



**DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED ONLINE  
VISUAL MERCHANDISING FRAMEWORK FOR APPAREL  
E-TAILERS: A SOUTH AFRICAN CONSUMERS'  
PERSPECTIVE**

by

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## DECLARATION

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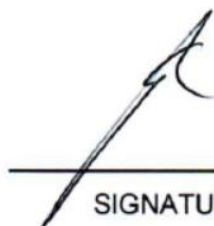
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework containing online visual merchandising themes that South African apparel e-tailers could use when developing an effective apparel e-store, with the main aim of possibly influencing consumer purchasing behaviour. The study adopted a consumer-centred response approach to online visual merchandising in an attempt to holistically consider this area of the South African e-tail industry from the consumer's perspective. The study followed a pragmatic paradigm that implemented a mixed-method approach.

The qualitative section of the mixed-method approach primarily comprised four focus group interviews as the main data-collection instrument. The data obtained during the qualitative section was analysed by Tesch's inductive descriptive coding technique, better known as thematic analysis. The findings obtained during the qualitative section were used as the basis for the quantitative section of the mixed-method approach, which implemented a self-administered web-based questionnaire as the data-collection instrument. The data was analysed by means of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.

The findings of the study delivered a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that consists of 13 themes and 82 items. This conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework will contribute to the South African apparel retail and e-tail industry, as both apparel brick-and-mortar retailers and apparel e-tailers in South Africa can benefit from using the conceptual integrated framework as a guideline. The value of the conceptual integrated framework lies in the fact that it includes consumers' views regarding the online visual merchandising themes. Therefore, apparel e-tailers, as well as brick-and-mortar retailers that want to develop an e-store, or update an existing e-store, can use this conceptual integrated framework as a guideline to make their online offering as attractive as possible. This way involves the least possible online risks to ensure that online trust is created, and ultimately, that consumer purchasing behaviour has been influenced.

**KEY TERMS:** Apparel; Online visual merchandising; E-tailing; E-tail environment; Retail; Online; Online shopper; Consumer purchasing behaviour; Online visual merchandising themes; Brick-and-mortar; E-shopper; E-store.

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## GLOSSARY

For the purpose of this study, the following terms will be defined as follows:

<b>Apparel</b>	Can be defined as clothing, especially outerwear, garments or attire that is used for the purpose of covering and decorating the body (Dictionary.com, 2011). Therefore clothing includes the covering of all body parts, such as gloves, scarves, shoes, and hats.
<b>E-tail</b>	Also referred to as electronic retail or online retail, and refers to businesses that are making use of the Internet to sell their products directly to people that have access to the Internet and that are interested in the products (Merriam-Webster, 2017b).
<b>E-tailing</b>	Refers to electronic retailing or online retailing, which refers to the selling of products over the Internet.
<b>E-tailer</b>	Refers to an electronic retailer or online retailer, for example, Zando that sells products over the Internet by means of electronic transactions.
<b>Retailing</b>	Can be defined as the timely delivery of goods and services demanded by consumers at prices that are competitive and affordable (Bharathi, 2010).
<b>Internet</b>	Can be described as a global electronic superhighway of computer networks that use a common protocol and that are linked by telecommunication lines and satellites. (Berman & Evans, 2013:177).
<b>Online</b>	Can be defined as sales where the final transaction is made over the Internet, regardless of whether the Internet has been used for browsing and/or comparing prices (Emerce Commerce, 2017; Retail Research: 2015a).

**Online visual  
merchandising**

Can be defined as a variety of merchandise items that are available for sale (online) and that are displayed in such a way that it encourages interest and influences consumers to make a purchase. The ultimate purpose of online visual merchandising is to display merchandise in an effective way to influence buying. Online visual merchandisers do not select or manage merchandise, but rather they enhance the performance of merchandise in the online store environment based on the consumers' behaviour (McKenzie, 2012).

**Visual  
merchandising**

Defined by Bell and Ternus (2006:20) as "... the process of promoting the sales of products by producing mental images that urge potential consumers to make purchases". According to Lusch, Dunne and Carver (2011:503), visual merchandising is described as the creative displays of merchandise by using props to create and decorate a specific scene/setting in the store.



# **CHAPTER 1:**

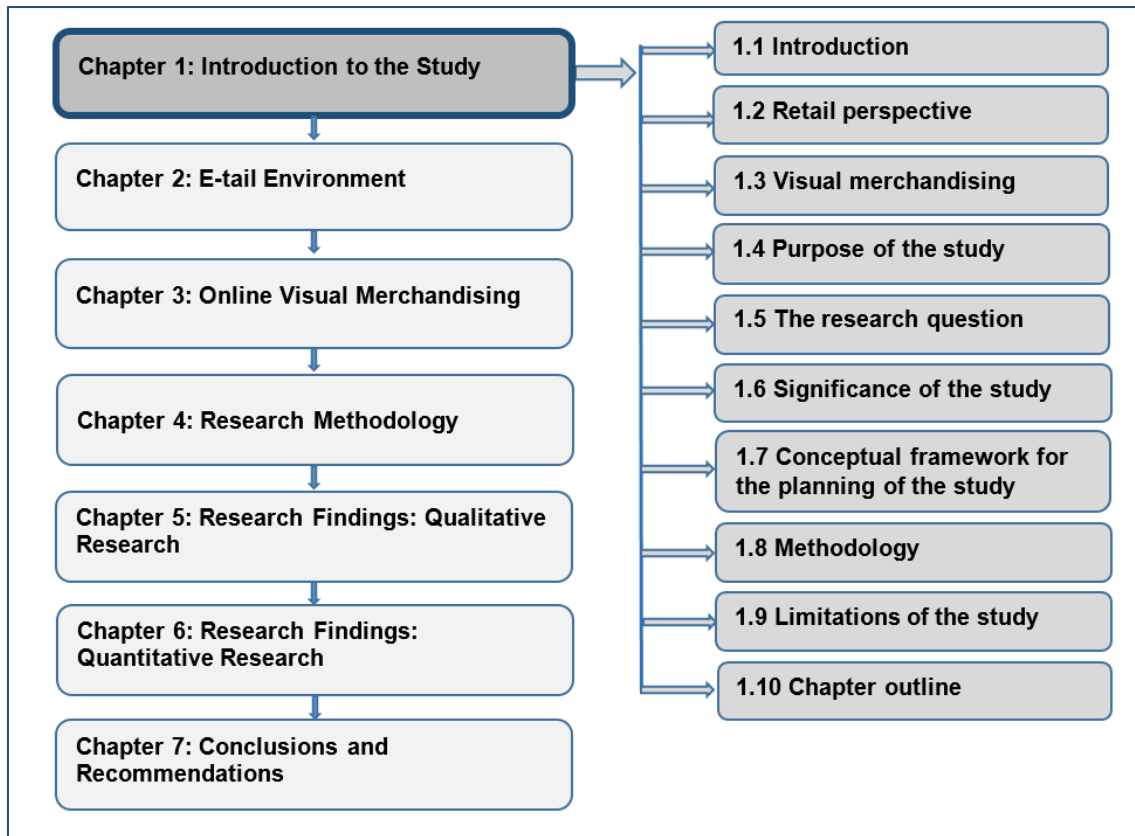
## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the last decade, the traditional retail environment has changed, as online shopping channels have been added to the traditional brick-and-mortar shopping channels (Slawsky, 2018:2). This is not only taking place in the United States of America (US), but all over the world (Khakimdjanova & Park, 2005:307). Selecting and purchasing merchandise online is one of the fastest growing shopping channels in the global market today, reducing the growth of the traditional brick-and-mortar store-based transactions (Slawsky, 2018:2; Park, Li & Jeon, 2009:916).

Despite the fact that the online retail (e-tail) industry is growing at an increasing pace, consumers are still hesitant to adopt online shopping, mainly due to the fact that they cannot experience products online in the same way that they can in the traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores (Ha & Lennon, 2010:142). The focus of this study was the development of a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that both e-tailers (online retailers), as well as traditional brick-and-mortar retailers, can use in the development of an online strategy (e-store). The visual merchandising framework focuses on online visual merchandising elements (referred to as themes for the purpose of this study) in efforts to try to reduce the risk of online shopping uncertainties and to enhance the likelihood of consumers partaking in online shopping activities.

This chapter commences with a brief background discussion on the global and South African retail and e-tail industry, the importance and the current situation thereof, followed by a short discussion on visual merchandising. After the background discussion, the purpose of the study, the research question and the research objectives are identified, followed by the significance of the study and a conceptual framework. A brief description is given of the research methodology that will be used to achieve the objectives set out in the research study, followed by the limitations experienced and a chapter outline. Figure 1.1 depicts the overall layout of the study including where Chapter 1 fits in and the expected layout of Chapter 1.



**Figure 1.1: Structure of Chapter 1**

Source: Author's own compilation

As depicted in Figure 1.1, the section that follows deals with the retail perspective.

## **1.2 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE**

This section presents a brief discussion of the global and South African retail and e-tail industry which will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

### **1.2.1 Background**

E-tailing is currently the fastest growing retail division in the world, specifically in first-world countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the European Union (EU), the US and China (Retail Research, 2017:1; Retail Research, 2015a:1; eMarketer, 2014:1). In 2014, the worldwide retail sales for both brick-and-mortar and online purchases reached \$22.492 trillion (eMarketer, 2014:1). The e-tail sales worldwide reached \$2.304 trillion in 2017, a total increase of 24.8% over 2016 (eMarketer, 2018:1).

Despite this growth, however, e-tail sales still account for only a small portion of the traditional brick-and-mortar sales, as e-tail sales made up only 10.2% of the total

worldwide retail sales in 2017, leaving brick-and-mortar with 89.8% of the total worldwide retail sales (eMarketer, 2018:1; eMarketer, 2014:1).

In Western Europe and Poland, e-tail sales increased from £174.76 billion (€201.33 billion) in 2015 to £201.90 billion (€232.60 billion) in 2016, an increase of 15.6%. This was followed by an expected increase of 14.2% in 2017, to a total of £230.62 billion (€265.68 billion) (Retail Research, 2017:1). A further growth rate of 13.8% was forecast for 2018, which means that the total e-tail sales for Western Europe was expected to reach £262.46 billion (€302.37 billion) (Retail Research, 2017:1).

In the US, e-tail sales totalled \$349.25 billion (£269.46 billion) in 2015, and increased by 14.4% to \$399.53 billion (£308.26 billion) in 2016. In 2017, e-tail sales were expected to increase by 14.9%, which represents a total of \$459.07 billion (£354.20 billion), and it was further forecast to grow by 15.4% to \$529.76 billion (£408.74 billion) in 2018 (Retail Research, 2017:1).

China, however, is the world leader in e-tail sales with an increase of more than 30% from 2016 (\$869 billion) to \$1.149 trillion in 2017, a total increase of 32% (Tong, 2018:1). PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (2018) reported that China reached \$307.4 billion in e-tail sales in the first quarter of 2018, which was an increase of 35.4% (year-on-year), while the US, as the second-largest world leader in e-tail sales, reached \$123.6 billion, and a 16.4% year-on-year increase.

With regards to South Africa, which is an emerging country, the e-tail industry is also growing, as online revenue increased by 33% from 2013 (R4.4 billion) to R5.3 billion in the 2014 financial year (SAPA, 2015:1). Goldstuck (in Writer, 2015a) and World Wide Worx (2018) indicated that e-tail sales grew by a further 26% in 2015, and reached a market size of R7.5 billion. In 2016, the e-tail sales growth rate of 20% was lower than in 2015, taking the rand value to R9 billion (World Wide Worx, 2018; Writer, 2016; It News Africa, 2016). During 2017 and 2018, the South African e-tail sales increased by 25% from R9 billion in 2016, to R11 billion in 2017, and to R14 billion in 2018. It is expected that the e-tail sales growth rate will dip to 20% during 2019 and 2020 (World Wide Worx, 2018).

Based on the above figures, it is evident that e-tail sales in South Africa are steadily on the rise, however, e-tail sales represented only 1.4% of the total retail sales in 2018,

compared to the total retail sales (including all channels, brick-and-mortar and e-stores) of R1 trillion (World Wide Worx, 2018; Reporter, 2018; Writer, 2016).

The question can be asked: What can be the possible causes for the low e-tail growth rate compared to the overall (brick-and-mortar and e-store) retail growth rate? Holmes (2014:2) mentioned that one possible reason for the low e-tail growth rate in South Africa might be the long distribution distances for delivery which increased the costs. According to Goldstuck (in Writer, 2015a), another reason is that there are still fears among South African online shoppers regarding the security of online shopping, as according to Harding (2015:1), consumers do not trust the online payment system. South African online shoppers also like the ability to see, touch, feel and try the merchandise before making a purchasing decision (Holmes, 2014:3). Ha and Lennon (2010:142) indicated that one of the main reasons for the slow e-tail growth rate might be the fact that consumers can only rely on the visual information displayed on the screen, and as the product cannot be physically experienced, online consumers might be uncertain about the type of fabric, colours and fit, specifically when making apparel-related purchases. All these aspects contribute to the high risk factor of purchasing apparel-related products from an e-store (Ha & Lennon, 2010:142).

From the discussion above it can be inferred that online purchases are becoming an increasingly popular trend in the world, and that the South African e-tail industry is slowly growing, but at a slower pace compared to the rest of the world. Due to the central use of the term “retail” in the background discussion above, a detailed discussion will be given in the following section based on a definition of retailing, the development of retailing and the South African e-tail industry.

### **1.2.2 Retail defined**

The term 'retail' is derived from the French word 'retailer' which means to cut a piece off or to break bulk, this implying a first-hand transaction with the customer (Bharathi, 2010). Retailing is a channel that manufacturers use to get their products to the end consumers. The manufacturers turn supplies into finished products, after which these final products are sent to the retailers for sale to the end consumers (About.com, 2015). The retailer can also buy the manufacturers' products from a middleman, known as a wholesaler, where products from around the world are combined and repackaged for easier marketing and distribution (About.com, 2015).

Retailers are the final stop in the supply chain, and are therefore defined as all the business activities that are involved in selling goods and services to consumers for their personal, family or household use (Berman & Evans, 2013:33). Furthermore, Bharathi (2010) defined retailing as the timely delivery of goods and services demanded by consumers at prices that are competitive and affordable. Mathur (2010:198) indicated that retailing is all about "... buying in larger quantities and selling in smaller quantities".

It involves the selling of merchandise to consumers (end-users) from an immovable or a moveable location, such as a department store or a vending machine. According to Varley and Rafiq (2014:2), a retailer is any institution that partakes in selling merchandise for personal or household use and that provides services related to the sale of such goods. However, for the purpose of this study, retailing refers to any organisation that sells small quantities of merchandise to the final consumers for their personal use.

It is clear from the definitions above that retailing plays an integral part in the exchange activity between the manufacturer and the end consumer, and it can therefore be concluded that retailing includes every sale made to the final consumer which ranges from apparel products, meals at a restaurant, cars, petrol, to magazines, and so forth.

The following section will focus on the development of the retail industry.

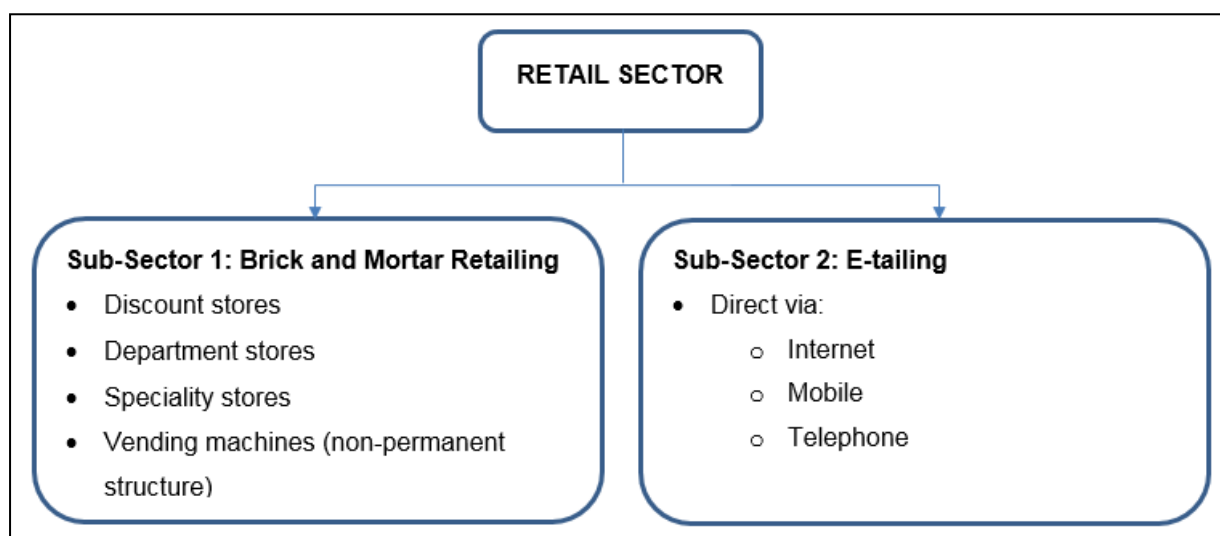
### **1.2.3 Evolution of retail**

Retailing has been around from the late 1800s and early 1900s in the form of independent speciality, single-product and corner stores (KPMG, 2009). From 1900 to 1940 the department store made its way into the market, and between 1940 and 1970 the era of the mall and mass retailers came into being for the first time (Leibowitz, 2013). From 1970 to 1990 the club store and category killers emerged, and from the 1990s onwards, the digital era came to be, and electronic-commerce (e-commerce) first made its entrance in the online world (Leibowitz, 2013).

The retail industry has changed drastically since the 1900s, and is marked by greater innovation, integration and responsiveness, and this is due to the changing needs of customers (KPMG, 2009). It is evident from the discussion above that retailing has taken on different forms and shapes from as early as the 1800s. This is due to new

management activities and marketing techniques, as well as to the changing and dynamic needs and wants of consumers (Bharathi, 2010).

One of the new forms and shapes of retailing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the advent of e-tailing. This is due to both fast-changing technology innovations and consumer needs and wants. However, the traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores are still popular and mostly used today. For the purpose of this study, two sub-sectors in the retail sector are discussed. The first sub-sector is the traditional brick-and-mortar retail component, and secondly, the e-tail sub-sector, as indicated in Figure 1.2 below. This study focuses on the latter, and it is therefore discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.



**Figure 1.2: Retail sector division**

Source: Adapted from Jensen (2015) and Kocic (2015)

The traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores are defined as businesses that have a physical presence, in other words, stores that one can drive or walk to and enter physically to see, touch and purchase products (Rouse, 2015).

Brick-and-mortar retail stores can be classified into different types, and the most commonly found brick-and-mortar retail stores are department stores, supermarkets, warehouse retailers, speciality retailers, convenience retailers and discount retailers (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). The types of brick-and-mortar retail stores are all classified according to the size of the business and the way in which products are sold (The Reseller Network, 2010).

Jensen (2015) indicates that the forms and shapes of retail establishments can be divided into four categories:

- The first category is 'stores' which consist of many different types, such as discount and department stores.
- The second category is 'direct' which refers to selling products by directly delivering or mailing the products to customers as the company can receive orders via the Internet, telephone or postal mail.
- The third category is 'automated' which refers to vending machines and any other automatic retailing system; and
- The fourth category is 'temporary' which refers to non-permanent structures in a temporary location, or pop-up-stores, for instance, a tent, trailer or table that is used to display products.

Besides the traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores, the retail sector also includes e-tailers as indicated in Figure 1.2 (Kocic, 2015). The term 'online' can be defined as a connection to, or through, a system such as a computer or telecommunications system (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Online sales refer to sales where the final transaction is made over the Internet, regardless of whether the Internet, more specifically the Web, was used for browsing and/or comparing prices (Emerce Commerce, 2017; Retail Research, 2015a).

The Internet is described as a global electronic superhighway of computer networks using a common protocol that are linked by telecommunication lines and satellites. The World Wide Web (www), commonly referred to as the Web, is one way of accessing information on the Internet, whereby people work with easy-to-use Web addresses (sites) and pages, therefore the Web is the interface that online users use to access information online (Berman & Evans, 2013:177).

Users see words, figures, videos, pictures and hear sounds which turn their computers, smartphones and tablets into interactive multimedia centres which make online interactive retailing easy (Berman & Evans, 2013:177). Therefore, both the Internet and the Web convey the same central theme, which is online interactive retailing (Berman & Evans, 2013:177). This means that both the Internet and the Web are used to search for products online.

Various types of e-tail categories are available for consumer purchases. To name only a few: book sellers, apparel and apparel-related accessories, airline tickets, personal

care, hotel reservations, food-related products, flowers, music, electronics and toys (Berman & Evans, 2013:178). Some retailers' products are purely online, and these are known as 'clicks-only' e-tail stores. Alternatively retailers can sell their products at both brick-and-mortar stores and online stores, and this is known as 'clicks-and-mortar' (or 'bricks-and-clicks') retailing (Berman & Evans, 2013:178).

For the purpose of this study (as indicated above), the focus will be on the e-tail industry, more specifically, the apparel e-tail industry. The reason and justification for this choice are given in the following section.

#### **1.2.4 South African e-tail industry**

E-tail sales as indicated in Section 1.2 are slowly growing in South Africa due to an expanding generation of young, internet-savvy individuals who have readily adopted new online technologies. According to WWW Metrics (n.d.:1), 51% of South Africans who have internet access will make an online purchase. Furthermore, Statista (2018) indicated that in 2018, 32.5 million individuals in South Africa, out of the entire population of 57 million (Stats SA, 2018), were active online users. The survey also found that 69% (Moyo, 2018) of the active online users spent an average of \$89.56 on online shopping (Statista, 2018).

According to Statista's survey, during 2017, online shoppers in the age category of 25 to 34 contributed 37.7% to South African online sales, followed by the age group 18 to 24 who contributed 27% (Statista, 2018). Female consumers contributed 50.2%, while male consumers contributed 49.8% towards online sales in 2017 (Statista, 2018). Couples (married or just living together) made up 13.2% of the online buying population, compared to the 18.9% of people who are separated or divorced (Writer, 2015a).

Goldstuck (in Writer, 2015a) mentioned that the biggest categories of e-tail purchases made during 2015 by South Africans were music and videos (3.6%), followed by gifts (2.8%), apparel (2.6%) and software (2.4%). However, during 2018, the most popular online shopping categories were apparel at 53%, entertainment and education at 51% and event tickets at 51% (BizzCommunity, 2018).

According to Statista (2018), the online market revenue per sector for 2018 added up to electronics and media at \$933 million; toys, hobby and DIY at \$634.7 million;



furniture and appliances at \$589.2 million; fashion at \$524.2 million; and food and personal care at \$232 million. All of this online revenue contributed only 1.4% towards the overall retail sales (R1 trillion) in South Africa (World Wide Worx, 2018; Reporter, 2018; Writer, 2016).

A comparison of these online sales to the overall retail sector in South Africa shows that the textile and clothing sector is the second largest contributor to the total retail sales, after general dealers (44%). During 2017, the South African clothing and textile sector contributed 18% towards the total retail sales, and its yearly growth rate was 2.3% at the end of 2017 (Stats SA, 2018).

Although it is evident from the discussion that the e-tail industry in South Africa is slowly growing, it is still behind that of the rest of the world (Prinsloo, 2013:3). The focus of this study is the apparel e-tail industry, as part of the clothing and textile industry which is the second largest contributor (18%) to the overall retail sales growth in South Africa (Stats SA, 2018). However, the online apparel industry is lagging behind, as online apparel purchases only contributed \$52.2 million towards the overall retail sales (Goldstuck, in Walter, 2015a). Furthermore, Ha and Lennon (2010:42) mentioned that apparel and apparel-related products have become some of the most popular merchandising categories for online purchases to date. Similarly, Gilbert (2019) and Writer (2019) confirmed that apparel remains the fastest growing sector in South Africa, with the highest business turnover. In addition, WWW Metrics (n.d.:1) indicated that apparel-related products are some of the most dominant merchandise categories purchased online in the US and Europe (Howland, 2018).

Due to these reasons, the online apparel industry is the focus of this study, and is briefly introduced in the following section.

### **1.2.5 Apparel e-tail industry**

The term apparel can be defined as clothing, especially outerwear, garments or attire used for the purpose of covering and decorating the body (Dictionary.com, 2011; Nell, 2013:x). This means that all body parts are covered by ready-made clothing, such as gloves, scarves, pants, skirts, dresses, blouses, shoes, hats, and so forth. For the purpose of this study, the concept of apparel e-tailing refers to any e-tailer that is selling apparel and apparel-related products, and the study therefore focuses on all apparel e-tailers in South Africa.

A study done by PwC on “Retailers and the Age of Disruption” indicated that 64% of active and potential online shoppers indicated that the ability to see, but not touch and/or try-on merchandise before buying, was the main reason for rather purchasing in-store (Writer, 2015b). Furthermore, unlike the traditional in-store environment, the e-store (website) provides limited product experience and information to consumers, due to the fact that not all five senses can be used to make an informed decision, and this makes Internet purchasing risky and untrustworthy for many consumers (Kuczwara, 2017; Park *et al.*, 2008:916; Khakimdjanova & Park, 2005:307; Wu, 2014:3). This, however, creates a big challenge for apparel e-tailers, as they need to create an online experience and offering that is visually appealing and that will draw the attention of consumers to their e-stores, the same as a traditional brick-and-mortar store would have done (Park *et al.*, 2008:72).

For this reason, this study aimed to create a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that will enable apparel e-tailers to provide online shoppers with a trusting and enjoyable shopping experience.

The next section focuses on visual merchandising: what it is, why it is important and how e-tailers can use it to create and stimulate online sales by influencing consumer purchasing behaviour in the apparel industry.

### **1.3 VISUAL MERCHANDISING**

The term visual merchandising can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century where merchandise was displayed in interesting and unique arrangements with the aim of attracting customers (Marie, 2008). Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and 200 years later, retail stores still make use of visual merchandising to attract customers. This is mainly due to the fact that people nowadays not only shop to purchase merchandise, but also to escape from their busy, rushed and stressed lifestyles, as well as to satisfy their inner needs and wants (Gobé, 2009:109; Deccan Chronicle, 2011:1). Therefore, retail stores that have pleasant in-store visual displays might attract more customers and increase the likelihood of purchasing (Liaw, 2007:1).

Visual merchandising is defined by Bell and Ternus (2006:20) as “... the process of promoting the sales of products by producing mental images that urge potential consumers to make purchases”. Wanninayake and Randiwela (2007:6) define visual

merchandising as the activity that synchronises effective merchandise selections with effective merchandise displays (Wu, 2014:11; Nell, 2013:15). Lusch *et al.* (2011:503) describe visual merchandising as the creative displays of merchandise by using props to create and decorate a specific scene/setting in the store. Moreover, Pegler (2010:1) states that visual merchandising is not just a matter of making merchandise look more attractive to consumers, but it is all about the physical selling of merchandise by means of a visual medium. It can therefore be inferred that visual merchandising is concerned with how the product/brand is visually communicated to the shoppers and if the intended message was correctly communicated to them (Nell, 2013:16).

In the traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores, visual merchandising themes (elements) are regarded as very important tools that are used to ensure that visual stimulation and communication are created within the store (Khakimdjanova & Park, 2005:308). Some of these elements that are commonly used by apparel retail stores are lighting, store layout, colours, temperature, music, fragrances, fixtures, props, signage and graphics, mannequins and visual displays (Dunne *et al.*, 2011:503). All these elements focus on the human senses of sight, sound, scent and touch, which consumers rely on when they are in the store. However, it is not possible to use all the senses when purchasing online (Ha & Lennon, 2010:142).

Due to the nature of the online purchase process, online shoppers can only rely on the visual information that is available on the screen, as the other senses are not involved (Kuczwara, 2017; Ha & Lennon, 2010:142). Wu (2014:3) indicated that e-tailers experience challenges that are different from those experienced by traditional brick-and-mortar retailers. The reason for this is that e-tailers can carry a much bigger variety of merchandise and can reach consumers from around the globe, but it also means that consumers have more options to choose from, and it is easy for them to switch from one e-store (website) to another to find the types of merchandise that they are looking for. It is therefore critical for e-tailers to attract the attention of consumers and to keep them on their e-stores (Ha, Kwon & Lennon, 2007:477).

There are some qualities and characteristics that differ distinctly between e-tail e-stores and traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores. Despite these differences, both e-tail and traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores have the same visual merchandising goal, namely, to draw consumers into their store and to have them make a purchase (Wu, 2014:13). As both have the same goal, there are many themes of visual

merchandising that they share. For example, the physical store layout (product departments and merchandise directories) in the traditional brick-and-mortar retail store resembles the layout and categorisation on the e-store of an e-tailer. Window display, promotion displays and signage in the traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores have the same purpose as merchandising promotion cues (ways in which products are presented) online.

The visual merchandising themes used for effective product presentation in an e-tail e-store function in the same way as mannequins and fixtures, lights and product grouping methods would in the traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores (Wu, 2014:13). Background colours and images on an e-tailer's e-store can create the image of the store in the same way as the colours, themes and all other graphics are used in the traditional brick-and-mortar store (Ha *et al.*, 2007:479). However, even if the similarities between traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores and e-tail e-stores are known, it is still a challenge for e-tailers to create an enticing e-store that will engage consumers and ultimately entice them to purchase.

In the US, UK, Europe, China and South-Korea apparel online purchases are very popular and show tremendous growth yearly, but in South Africa, this is not the case (Katrandjiev, 2014:84; Ha & Lennon, 2010:142; Ha *et al.*, 2007:478; Ji & Pang, 2006:307). Therefore, it can be inferred that South African apparel e-tailers should carefully consider and investigate the use of online visual merchandising themes when creating an e-store.

The next section will focus on the purpose of the study.

## **1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The low online growth rate in South Africa, according to Holmes (2014:3), is caused by South African consumers not trusting the online payment system, as well as not being able to see, touch, feel and try the merchandise before making a purchasing decision. Consumers can therefore only rely on the visual information displayed on the screen, and as the product cannot be physically experienced, consumers might be uncertain about the type of fabric, colours and fit (Kuczwara, 2017; Ha & Lennon, 2010:142).

The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework containing online visual merchandising themes that e-tailers can use when developing an effective apparel e-store to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. The identified online visual merchandising themes for the conceptual integrated framework is based on the perspectives and views of apparel consumers in South Africa, and will contribute to the South African and global apparel e-tail industry.

Online visual merchandising in South Africa has received very little attention in the literature to date, especially regarding the online visual merchandising themes that apparel e-tailers can use as a framework when developing an e-store.

This study will benefit traditional brick-and-mortar retailers as they will be able to use this conceptual integrated framework of online visual merchandising themes as a framework when implementing an e-store in addition to their current traditional marketing efforts. The apparel e-tailers will benefit as they will be able to improve their current e-store by using this conceptual integrated framework of online visual merchandising themes. Therefore, both traditional brick-and-mortar and apparel e-tailers in South Africa could use the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that was developed from the research findings and outcomes of this study as basis when creating an e-store. Alternatively, the outcomes and findings can be used purely for academic purposes and future research.

The following section will focus on the research questions and objectives of the study.

## **1.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

Visual merchandising plays an integral role in the retail industry (Levy, Weitz, & Beitelspacher, 2012:489), as visual displays have the ability to influence consumer purchasing intentions (Khakimdjanova & Park, 2005:308).

Although the existing literature does touch on online visual merchandising, the majority of these studies were done in the US, China and South Korea. These studies focused on a range of topics, such as developing a taxonomy of visual merchandising cues (Ha *et al.*, 2007:447), identifying, classifying and measuring the online visual merchandising elements and sub-elements relevant to apparel online shops (Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014: 84), exploring the current practice of visual

merchandising among e-tailers (Khakimdjanova & Park, 2005:307; Ji & Pang, 2006:307), and determining the differences in online visual merchandising practices of online apparel retailers between Korea and China (Park *et al.*, 2009: 916) (refer to Appendix B for a detailed summary of past studies).

As far as could be established, no studies on online visual merchandising have been done in South Africa, nor has an online visual merchandising framework been developed. No research has been done in South Africa into the viewpoints of consumers regarding the use of online visual merchandising themes. Therefore the purpose of this research study was to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that e-tailers can use when developing an effective apparel e-store to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

The research question derived from the preliminary literature study was therefore as follows: Apparel retailers use visual merchandising themes for various reasons, such as to enhance the overall shopping experience and to display and promote the apparel items in a visually appealing manner to generate interest and ultimately sales; can apparel e-tailers use the online visual merchandising themes to the same effect? From the research question, the following specific primary and secondary objectives were derived.

#### **1.5.1 Primary objective**

The primary research objective of the study was to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that can be used by apparel e-tailers in South Africa to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

From the primary objective a number of secondary objectives were formulated.

#### **1.5.2 Secondary objectives**

The secondary objectives as derived from the primary objective are as follows:

- to identify visual merchandising themes that need to be incorporated into an online visual merchandising framework from a consumer's perspective;
- to determine the factors that decrease the likelihood of consumers purchasing online;
- to determine the reasons why consumers are purchasing online;

- to develop an online visual merchandising framework containing concepts based on the identified online visual merchandising themes;
- to determine the relationships (propositions) among the conceptual framework constructs; and
- to identify areas for future research.

The above objectives were formulated to address the identified problem / opportunity. The next section focuses on the significance of the study.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The available literature regarding this subject area focused on various aspects and dimensions related to visual merchandising. For example, Ha *et al.* (2007:478) examined the visual merchandising elements of apparel retail websites to determine the similarities between online and traditional visual merchandising. Katrandjiew and Velinov (2014:84) identified, classified and measured the online visual merchandising elements and sub-elements of apparel online stores, while Khakimdjanova and Park (2005:307), Ji and Pang (2006:307) and Park *et al.* (2009:916) investigated the current practices of visual merchandising among apparel e-tailers.

For their part, Ha and Lennon (2010:141) examined the effect of the different online visual merchandising cues on consumers' pleasure and arousal under different situational involvements, while Park *et al.* (2008:72) focused on the effect that rotation in product presentations have on consumers' responses. Similarly, Wu (2014:1) explored online visual merchandising variables and how they affected consumer behaviour, based on the stimuli-organism-response (SOR) framework. Park and Stoel (2002:158) examined the website quality of leading US internet apparel retailers.

It is clear from the above that the term online visual merchandising has been investigated in various ways. However, none of the studies have developed an online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour and to enhance consumers' online trust, especially not in South Africa. The majority of the above-mentioned studies were conducted in different parts of the world, specifically in the US, China, Korea and South Korea.

A gap in the literature was therefore identified, and the opportunity was taken to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-

tailers in South Africa, based on the consumers' perspective, to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

This research study adopted a consumer-centred response approach to online visual merchandising in an attempt to holistically consider this area of the e-tail industry from the consumer's perspective. This research study explored an area in the e-tail industry that has received very little attention in literature, especially in South Africa. The study will benefit both traditional brick-and-mortar and apparel e-tailers in South Africa, as the consumers' views regarding online visual merchandising themes are determined, which could have an influence on consumer purchasing behaviour.

The following section illustrated the conceptual framework of the study.

## **1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PLANNING OF THE STUDY**

A conceptual framework provides a theoretical overview of the entire study, showing the proposed research and order within the research process (Trafford & Leshem, 2012:84). Therefore, a conceptual framework was developed for this study to illustrate how the literature and empirical study fit together (see Figure 1.3 below).



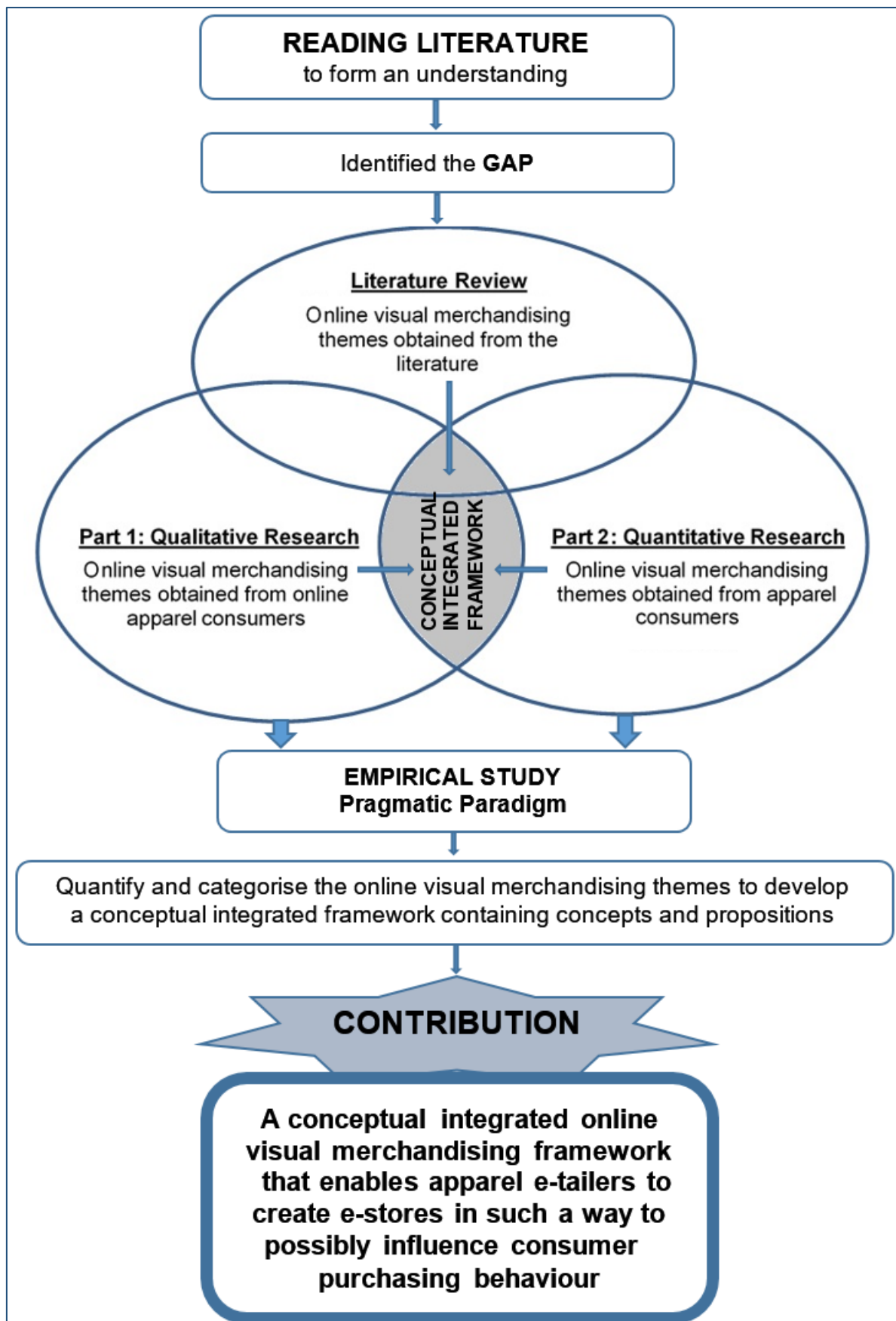


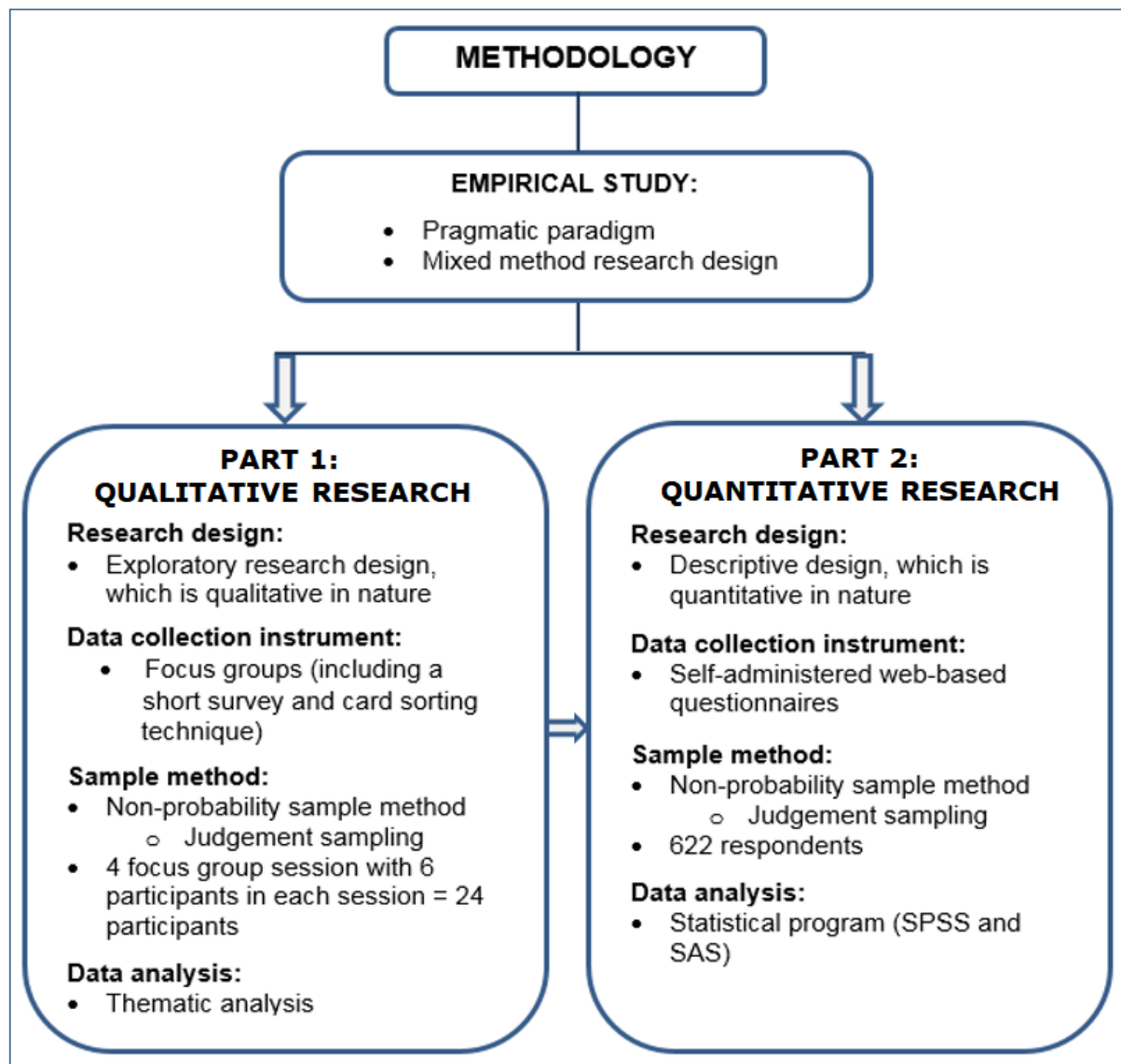
Figure 1.3: Conceptual framework for the planning of the study

Source: Author's own compilation

The methodology is discussed in the next section.

## 1.8 METHODOLOGY

The problem that a research study aims to investigate generally determines the most appropriate methodology for answering the research question. The main components of the research methodology for the purposes of this study are explained as they appear in Figure 1.4 below.



**Figure 1.4: Research methodology**

Source: Author's own compilation

A more detailed discussion of the research methodology employed in the study that this thesis is based on, is presented in Chapter 4.

### **1.8.1 Research design**

For the purpose of this study, a pragmatic paradigm was implemented which focuses on a mixed-method research design consisting of two parts: Part 1 has an exploratory research design which is qualitative in nature, and Part 2 has a descriptive research design which is quantitative in nature.

According to Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin (2010:54), exploratory research is conducted to clarify new or unclear situations or to find possible business opportunities through the gathering of in-depth information on a topic (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:54; Nell, 2013:9).

Exploratory research was therefore deemed appropriate for the first part of this research study, as the aim of the Part 1 (the qualitative research) was to obtain insight from the perspective of South African online apparel consumers about the online visual merchandising themes that might possibly influence their purchasing behaviour, and reduce the identified concerns as indicated in Chapter 1 and Section 4.4.1 in Chapter 4.

Babin and Zikmund (2016:54) indicated that "... descriptive research describes characteristics of objects, people, groups, organisations or environments". More specifically, descriptive research addresses the 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why' and 'how' questions.

Therefore, a descriptive research design was deemed appropriate for the second part of the study, as the information obtained from Part 1 (the qualitative, exploratory design) needed to be tested descriptively in Part 2 of the research study among South African apparel consumers to obtain generalisable findings. The information obtained in Part 1 was used in combination with the elements obtained from the literature study (Chapters 1, 2 and 3) to develop a self-administered web-based questionnaire which was used in Part 2 of the study to collect data from South African apparel consumers.

A qualitative approach is usually contextual in nature, meaning that all the collected data indicates how and why things occur as they do. It includes a collection of interpretive techniques which try to explain, decode, translate or else come to terms with the meaning and not the frequency (Cooper & Schindler, 2008:162). A quantitative approach, in contrast, addresses research objectives through empirical assessments that encompass numerical measurements and analytical approaches.

Quantitative research involves less interpretation, and can therefore stand on its own (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:111).

A mixed-method approach was deemed as appropriate for this study, as the results of both qualitative (Part 1) and quantitative research (Part 2) are needed to firstly, discover what the online visual merchandising themes are, as based on South African apparel consumers' viewpoints (in Part 1), and secondly, to test these identified themes quantitatively (in Part 2) among South African apparel consumers, to be able to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework. Therefore, due to the mixed-method research design, both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered.

### **1.8.2 Empirical study**

As illustrated in Figure 1.4, the empirical study was divided in two parts:

- Part 1, the qualitative research study, which implemented an exploratory design, and
- Part 2, the quantitative research study, which implemented a descriptive design.

A detailed discussion of both the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study can be found in Chapter 4, Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2.

Below follows a brief discussion of the two parts of this study.

#### **1.8.2.1 Part 1: Qualitative research**

Part 1 employed qualitative research which means that an unstructured, exploratory research design was implemented. This section of the study made use of a small sample to obtain detailed insight and understanding of the specific problem at hand (Malhotra, 2010:73). Focus group interviews were used to collect data.

Part 1 of the study employed a non-probability sample method, as not all South African online consumers had a fair chance of being chosen to be part of the sample (Schindler, 2019:96). The focus group participants were therefore deliberately chosen to be part of the sample based on the personal judgement of the researcher with regards to their deemed ability to provide suitable insights to the study.

The focus group participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria of the study, namely, they must be South African male and female consumers who:

- have bought apparel-related items from an apparel e-store (website) before;
- are older than 18 years;
- can read, write and speak English;
- have the time and are willing to participate.

Four focus group interviews, each consisting of six participants, were held. The same semi-structured questions (see Appendix D and E for the focus group questions) were used for each group. The semi-structured questions were based on the objectives of the study and the identified online visual merchandising themes as derived from the literature study (Chapter 3, Section 3.6).

The information obtained from the four focus group interviews was thematically analysed into relevant themes and categories. After the focus group interviews, each participant completed a short survey (see Appendix F for the short survey questionnaire). The final step after the short survey, was a card sorting activity where the participants had to sort 12 cards based on the identified online visual merchandising themes. The participants had to sort the 12 cards in order of importance, 1 being most important and 12 being least important (see Appendix G for the 12 cards).

The purpose of both the short survey and card sorting technique was to ensure confirmability of findings between the three data-collection techniques used in Part 1 of the study. Furthermore, the results obtained from the qualitative research in Part 1 of the study were used in the quantitative research conducted in Part 2 of the study.

#### **1.8.2.2 Part 2: Quantitative research**

Part 2 employed quantitative research, which refers to a research method that makes use of a larger and more representative sample by addressing the research objectives through an experiential assessment that involves numerical measurements and analysis (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:112; Wiid & Diggines, 2015:95; Nell, 2013:77). Quantitative research tends to be more structured, which makes it easier to measure and to analyse the responses.

A self-administered web-based questionnaire was used as the research instrument in Part 2 of the study. A self-administered web-based questionnaire was deemed to be appropriate for obtaining the relevant information from South African consumers who

had purchased apparel-related products from an e-store in the past. The respondents were selected based on the following inclusion criteria of the study:

- all South African male and female consumers who have bought apparel related items from an apparel e-store (website) before,
- who are older than 18 years,
- who can read, write and speak English,
- who have access to email and Internet,
- who have the time and willingness to participate, and
- who are on the database of iFeedback.

Respondents could be deliberately chosen to be part of the sample based on the personal judgement of the researcher with regards to their deemed ability to provide suitable insight to the study. A non-probability sample method was therefore employed in Part 2 of the study.

The self-administered web-based questionnaire was developed after the completion of Part 1 of the study, to incorporate the online visual merchandising themes that had been identified by the South African online apparel consumers. The structured questions in the self-administered web-based questionnaire were based on the objectives of the study (see Appendix I for the self-administered web-based questionnaire).

A total of 622 respondents completed the self-administered web-based questionnaire and the findings were analysed by means of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.

The sample sizes for both parts of the study, namely, the qualitative research and the quantitative research were considered satisfactory by Unisa's Bureau of Market Research (BMR).

### **1.8.3 Data analysis and results**

Part 1 of the study made use of thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the focus group interviews, short survey and card sorting, as the research study was contextual in nature. Thematic analysis can be described as a qualitative research process that involves intensive searching through data to identify

any possible patterns that might occur more than once (Tesch, 1990:113; Nell, 2013:11).

The exploratory influence of this acknowledged technique can be enhanced when the analyst requires background information on the research topic, and therefore cannot be influenced by unfairness. However, it is recommended that the analyst should at least have a basic understanding of the research topic at hand before data analysis starts (Tesch, 1990:113; Nell, 2013:12).

Part 2 of the study made use of the statistical program SPSS version 23 to analyse the quantitative data obtained from the self-administered web-based questionnaires. Before the analysis process started, the data was cleaned, edited and validated, to ensure that no errors occurred during the analysis process.

Rigour and ethics in mixed-method research are discussed next.

#### **1.8.4 Rigour and ethics**

The necessary ethical strategies that are relevant to the mixed-method design of this research study were applied throughout the duration of this study. The strategies included the assurance of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability and authenticity, as well as reliability and validity. These strategies to ensure rigour and ethics are discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.5.

The following section focuses on the limitations of the study.

### **1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following limitations are associated with this research study:

- Part 1 of the study incorporated an exploratory design which was qualitative in nature. A non-probability judgement sampling method was employed which can be regarded as a limitation, as the findings cannot be generalised to the greater population. It would therefore be advisable for future researchers to select a more representative sample.
- Further, based on the above point, the sample for Part I of the study (qualitative research) was drawn from consumers living in the Gauteng province that met the inclusion criteria, and was therefore not geographically representative of all nine provinces in South Africa. However, due to the qualitative nature of Part 1 of the

study, the main aim was not to be representative, but rather to be able to use the research findings for Part 2 of the study in the quantitative research.

- Part 2 of the study (quantitative research) centres on the non-probability, judgement sampling technique which was used in the first part of the study and may limit the generalisability of the results. Whilst the sample may be representative in terms of the demographics of the population of online shoppers, the majority of the respondents emanated from the Gauteng area and may thus not be representative of the broader South African population.
- Furthermore, the sampling technique may have contributed to smaller sample sizes for the various groups within the sample which made statistical comparisons between all the groups included within the sample untenable. In addition to this, the online sampling method (used in the self-administered web-based questionnaire) led to a high number of missing data within the sample, which may have an impact on the results of the statistical analyses.
- All the people who indicated that they cannot read, speak or write English were excluded from both parts of the study, as this was a requirement based on the inclusion criteria as stipulated in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2.
- Any male and female consumers that have not purchased apparel-related products online from an e-store in the past, could also not be part of the study, as this was a requirement based on the inclusion criteria as stipulated in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2.

The following section presents the chapter outline of the study.

## **1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

**Chapter 1** presented the introduction to the research study and explained the purpose of the study. This chapter provided a brief background discussion of the global and South African retail industry, and the importance and the current situation thereof. This was followed by a short discussion of visual merchandising, the purpose of the study, the research question and the research objectives that were formulated to address the problem. Lastly, the research methodology was briefly described.

**Chapter 2** deals with the e-tail environment. This chapter commences with a brief discussion of the macro environment, focusing on the technological developments



which led to the online environment. Thereafter, this chapter will focus on the e-tail environment which encompasses all the relevant aspects, such as the importance of e-tailing, the types and forms of e-tail, the e-tail strategy, and the e-tail strategy used to stimulate online sales.

**Chapter 3** deals with online visual merchandising. This chapter commences with a detailed discussion of online visual merchandising, its purpose, functions, and why it is important for online apparel e-tailers. It also identifies the existing online visual merchandising themes that are available in the literature domain.

**Chapter 4** explains the methodology that is relevant to the research study. It focuses on the research process, and offers an explanation of the research design, sampling techniques, data-collection instruments and data analysis techniques that were used. The limitations of the study, ethical aspects and the strategies followed to ensure the validity of the data are also pointed out.

**Chapter 5** focuses on the findings of Part 1 of the study, the qualitative research. The data collected from the focus group interviews, short survey and card sorting is analysed and discussed according to themes and categories, which form part of thematic analysis. The findings obtained in this section were used in the design of the self-administered web-based questionnaire used in Part 2 of the study.

**Chapter 6** focuses on the findings of Part 2 of the study, the quantitative research. The data collected from the self-administered web-based questionnaire was statistically analysed by means of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 and discussed and illustrated through the use of graphs and figures.

**Chapter 7** emphasises the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The findings reported on in Chapters 5 and 6 are used to address each of the objectives. Recommendations are made based on the findings. These are followed by a discussion on the contribution of this study to the South African apparel e-tail industry and suggestions are also made for future research purposes.

## **CHAPTER 2: E-TAIL ENVIRONMENT**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

All types of organisations, whether corporates, retailers or suppliers operate in the marketing environment, which refers to all the controllable and uncontrollable internal and external factors that have a direct effect on the marketing activities of an organisation (Cant, 2013:30). The term 'marketing environment' refers to the micro-, market- and macro environments which are dynamic and change all the time (Cant, Van Heerden & Ngambi, 2013:34).

The micro environment refers to all internal factors, such as funds to be used, staff to be employed, the mission, the marketing objectives and the strategy of the organisation which are all factors that can be controlled by top management (Cant, 2013:31; Kotler *et al.*, 2010:81).

The market environment can be influenced by the organisation, but cannot be controlled by the organisation, and consists of customers, competitors and suppliers.

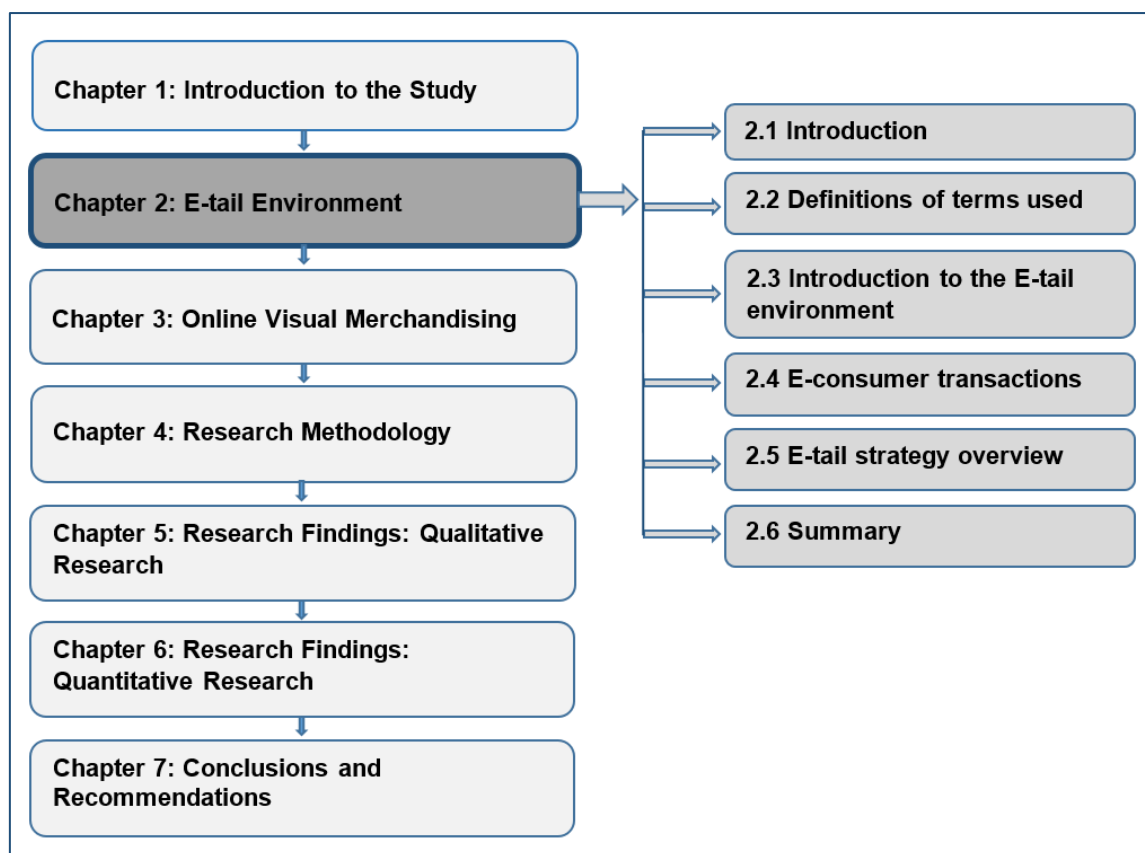
The macro environment refers to those factors in the environment over which the organisation has no control (Cant 2013:42), and which need to be monitored on a continuous basis as they frequently change. These factors include political, international, physical, economic, social and technological factors.

One of the fastest-changing factors in the macro environment is technology (Kotler *et al.*, 2010:92; Cant, 2013:44). Organisations that do not keep abreast of technological developments, will find that their products are outdated and they will therefore miss out on new products- and market opportunities (Kotler *et al.*, 2010:93). According to Erdis and Cant (2015:16), technology can be regarded as a vital competitive tool, especially in the retail industry, and if retailers keep up with the latest innovations in the fast-changing consumer markets. The development of new technologies has introduced new forms of retailing, such as e-tailing, multi-channel retailing and mobile retailing (Erdis & Cant, 2015:16), which are defined in Section 2.2 below.

For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the e-tail environment. Section 2.2 provides a glossary of terms used throughout this chapter. Section 2.3 defines the e-

tail environment, followed by a discussion of the various e-tail formats, advantages and disadvantages for both e-tailers and consumers, as well as the risks and trust issues associated with e-tailers. Section 2.4 introduces an e-tail strategy, with specific reference to the definition of an e-tail strategy, the purpose of an e-tail strategy, and the development of a successful e-tail strategy based on online visual merchandising cues. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Figure 2.1 depicts the overall layout of the study, including where Chapter 2 fits in, and the expected layout of Chapter 2 as summarised above.



**Figure 2.1: Structure of Chapter 2**

Source: Author's own compilation

As depicted in Figure 2.1, the following section provides definitions of terms used throughout this chapter and study.

## 2.2 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Below are various definitions of terms that are used throughout the chapter that can cause confusion among readers.

<b>Brick-and-mortar</b>	The business model of offering products and services to consumers from a physical building, such as a shopping mall, a corner or street store, or an office park (Merriam-Webster, 2017a).
<b>Business</b>	An organisation or economic system where products and services are exchanged for money. A business needs some form of investment and enough consumers to sell its products or services to make a profit. Businesses can be privately owned, they can be non-profit businesses or government-owned businesses (BusinessDictionary, 2017d).
<b>Electronic</b>	There are "... devices or technology associated with or employing low voltage current and solid state integrated circuits or components, usually for transmission and/or processing of analog or digital data" (BusinessDictionary, 2017b). For the purpose of this study, electronic (e) refers to being online by using the Internet for various reasons, such as selling, communicating, or providing product information, and so forth.
<b>E-shopper</b>	This is an online shopper, who is defined as a consumer (person, individual) in front of a screen (computer, mobile device) who orders and pays for the selected products online (from a website) or by sending an email (European Consumer Centre, 2014).
<b>E-store</b>	This is a website which is defined as a joined group of pages on the World Wide Web that is regarded as a single unit, and is maintained by one person, organisation, company and/or retailer (Dictionary.com, 2017a).
<b>E-strategy</b>	This is an e-business strategy which includes all types of businesses, such as retailers/e-tailers, organisations, suppliers, and so on, that conduct business over the Internet. An e-strategy defines both short-and long-term goals, as well as the overall

	goals, and involves critical, careful and skilled planning (Collier, 2013; CioIndex, 2008).
<b>E-tail environment</b>	This term refers to the 'place or context' wherein e-tailing takes place, which is the Internet (Springer Link, 2003).
<b>E-transaction</b>	Is also referred to as an online transaction, and is described as the sale of products or services between businesses, households, individuals, and so on over the Internet (OECD, 2001).
<b>Mobile retailing</b>	Refers to retail shopping where products are purchased via means of a smartphone, tablet or other mobile device (Retail Research, 2015b).
<b>Multi-channel retailing</b>	Can be described as a marketing strategy that offers consumers various choices of ways to purchase products and/or services, which can include brick-and-mortar stores, websites, telephone ordering, mail orders, interactive television, and catalogue ordering (Linton, 2017).
<b>Online</b>	Refers to being connected to a network of computers or devices through the Internet (Rouse, 2017a). For the purpose of this study, online also refers to 'electronic' as well as websites, as both terms refer to making use of the Internet. Online can also be defined as sales where the final transaction is made over the Internet, regardless of whether the Internet has been used for browsing and/or comparing prices (Emerce Commerce, 2017; Retail Research, 2015a).
<b>Online shopper</b>	Can be described as a consumer (person, individual) that is in front of a screen (computer, mobile device) and orders and pays for the selected products online (from a website) or by sending an email (European Consumer Centre, 2014). For the purpose of this study, online shoppers will be referred to as e-shoppers (electronic).

<b>Online shopping</b>	The purchasing of products or services over the Internet by means of a device such as a computer, smartphone, tablet or telephone. (BusinessDictionary, 2017c).
<b>Organisations</b>	Refers to a collective group of people, structured and managed in such a way to satisfy needs or to follow specific goals. All organisations have a management structure in place that determines the associations among different activities and members, and which divides and allocates roles, responsibilities and power to carry out different tasks. Organisations affect other organisations and are also affected by the environment (external and internal) and therefore it is an open system (BusinessDictionary, 2017a).
<b>Social media sites</b>	These are websites that allow subscribers to interact, by requesting that others add them to their list of contacts or by starting or joining a specific group, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so forth (Dictionary.com, 2017b).
<b>Strategy</b>	Is defined as a plan of action designed to achieve a short- and long-term goals or an overall goal (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017).
<b>Website</b>	Is defined as a joined group of pages on the World Wide Web that is regarded as a single unit and is maintained by one person, organisation, company and/or retailer (Dictionary.com, 2017a). For the purpose of this study, a website will be referred to as an e-store (electronic).

The terms defined above will be used throughout the remaining part of the chapter. In accordance with the main topic of his study, a complete discussion on the e-tail environment will follow in the subsequent section.

## 2.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE E-TAIL ENVIRONMENT

Poloian (2013:73) said "...we live in a time when technology reinvents itself as frequently as we change our clothes", and it continues to influence the retailing sector

(Poloian, 2013:73). According to Poloian (2013:74) and Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012:71), none of the other facets of retail development has changed as rapidly or presented as many new opportunities and formats to the consumer as online selling, and this is due to technology. Technology allows retailers to distribute goods through their marketing channels at a much quicker pace, and more efficiently than ever before (Poloian, 2013:73).

Technology enables consumers to have fun while shopping online due to innovative electronic marketing (for example, video demonstrations). In addition, there are social media sites where consumers can share and discuss merchandise items with friends, and consumers can also shop in a more convenient (24/7) and knowledgeable manner. Retailers are also able to measure and judge customer needs more effectively through the use of technology (Poloian, 2013:73). Poloian (2013:73) indicated that the acceptance and implementation of change in the e-environment is needed if organisations plan to grow while engaging their customers.

Standing (2009:3) indicated that although security issues are still a factor in the adoption and use of e-tailing, consumers are increasingly turning to the Internet, not only to make comparisons and find out information, but also to make purchases. At the current time, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, customers are fascinated by what the Internet has to offer, from products across the world, to the proliferation of new, current and dated information, and all this due to the power of search engines such as Google.

Poloian (2013:74) indicated that the online services available to consumers in modern times have changed lives, and this applies as much to aspects such as dating, to making downloads, to improved communication due to e-mail and tweets. Social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, are constantly being used to distribute retail information. Poloian (2013:74) further indicated that the availability of blogs, customer reviews and the option to order online, but to pick-up in-store increase the choices of retailing.

According to Standing (2009:3), "... e-tailing has gone from strength to strength", but it is critical for e-tailers to respond to the customers' changing needs and demands in relation to where and when they are logged on, otherwise the customers will move on to the next e-store, offering more or less the same item of interest (Poloian, 2013:74). Standing (2009:3) further pointed out that regardless of the success of e-tailing, the

factors that enable organisations to be successful are still the focus of research. One of the key reasons for this is that the Internet has become crowded with many organisations offering the same products and services, and it has therefore become difficult for consumers to make comparisons on price alone, as organisations have started to group products together (Standing 2009:3). Furthermore, Chaston (2015:184) indicated that e-shoppers planning to purchase medium to high-value products, will spend a large amount of time double-checking and comparing prices and deals by obtaining information from various e-stores before making a final decision. However, this is not the case with low-value products, as low prices are still a more effective selling point than providing more information (Chaston, 2015:184).

To effectively conceptualise the e-tail environment, the definition of e-tail needs to be interrogated further before discussing the e-tailing environment in more detail.

### **2.3.1 Definition of e-tailing**

As previously indicated in Section 2.2, e-tailing, also known as electronic retailing and online retailing, refers to any organisation that is making use of the Internet to sell products and/or services directly to consumers that are interested in the specific products and/or services and who have access to the Internet in some way (Merriam-Webster, 2017b). In simpler terms, e-tailing can be described as the selling of retail goods on the Internet (Business Jargon, n.d.). According to Rouse (2017b) e-tailing is linked to business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions, meaning that the e-tailer interacts directly with the consumer, eliminating the involvement of any intermediaries.

For the purpose of this study, e-tailing will be defined as the selling of apparel-related merchandise items electronically over the Internet by apparel e-tailers.

A review of the literature revealed that there are various e-tail formats (Berman & Evans, 2013:165; Poloian, 2013:192) that retail organisation can implement to interact more directly with consumers. Some of these formats are discussed in the section below.

### **2.3.2 Various e-tailing formats**

Retail organisations make use of various formats when planning how to offer products and/or services to the final consumer. Literature based on the work of Berman and



Evans (2013:165), Poloian (2013:192-193) and Prinsloo (2013:11) have identified the various types of e-tailer formats as indicated in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1: E-tailing format types**

<b>Format type</b>	<b>Description of format</b>
<b>Pure-play e-tailers</b>	Also referred to as 'click only' e-tailers. These are organisations that sell their products only online and that do not have a brick-and-mortar retail store or engage in any other non-store distribution, for example, Takealot.com, Zando.co.za and Spree.co.za.
<b>Single-channel retailers</b>	Refers to retailers that can sell their products to consumers through only one retail format which can either be a brick-and-mortar store or an online store, catalogues or direct selling. South African examples of single-channel e-tailers are Spree.co.za, Zando.co.za and Takealot.com, as they only have an online store. An examples of a single-channel retailer is Sunglass Hut, as they only have brick-and-mortar stores.
<b>Dual-channel retailers</b>	Also referred to as 'clicks-and-mortar' retailers. These are organisations that operate from both a brick-and-mortar store and an online store, for example, Mr Price, Jet, and Nine West, to name a few.
<b>Multi-channel retailing</b>	Refers to retail organisations that sell through more than two (multiple) channels, such as a brick-and-mortar store, an online store and a mobile application. For example, Woolworths sell their products through a brick-and-mortar store, an online store and a mobile application; Verimark sell their products through a brick-and-mortar store, an online store and a catalogue, and Makro sell their products through a brick-and mortar store, an online store and a click-and-collect location store.
<b>Click and collect e-tailers</b>	Refers to consumers purchasing products from an online store, but instead of the products being delivered, the consumers prefer to collect the order from a specific brick-and-mortar store or location. A typical example of a click-and-collect store is the Massmart-owned wholesaler Makro that has partnered with Sasol petrol stations to build 'click-and-collect' lockers where consumers can collect their online purchases from a preferred location (Massmart, 2015).
<b>Electronic spin-offs</b>	These are retailers that sell products via channels different from online. For example, the television shopping channel, 'Homemark'.
<b>Non-transactional sites</b>	This refers to the retailer that has an online site which provides information about the organisation and its products and/or services, but does not offer the option to buy online. Many small retailers have non-transactional sites which only provide information, for example, Accessorize has an online site that

	provides information about their products, such as price and type of material, but there is no option to purchase their products.
<b>Online shopping malls</b>	<p>This has changed the definition of shopping as it refers to having many stores under one website which enables shoppers to purchase from various 'brands/stores' and have only one check-out/transaction at the end of the shopping activity (Kentkbb.com, 2016).</p> <p>An online shopping mall has all types of products in its online store, such as gifts, clothes, kitchen appliances, commercial appliances, home appliances, jewellery, books, stationary, and so on. A typical example in South Africa, is NetFlorist that offers consumers various options of products and services on one website. Spree.com and Takealot.com are also examples of online shopping malls.</p>
<b>Auction sites</b>	<p>This refers to auctions which are conducted on a e-store (website) that allow users to buy from and/or sell goods to other users, and it has become one of the most-visited web pages on the Internet (Computer Hope, 2016). Electronic auctions are opportunities for consumers to be entertained and perhaps obtain a great buy in a reasonably secure environment. Most auction sites charge sellers a listing fee and percentage of the selling price. eBay.com is a good example of an auction site specialising in collectibles, such as Pokémon, Hello Kitty and Lego, antiques, vehicles, and products that appeal to special-interest groups. BidorBuy is also a good example of an auction site.</p>

Brick-and-mortar retailers have taken a pre-emptive approach by adding e-stores (websites) and/or catalogues to their selling strategy to become either a multi-channel retailer or a click-and-mortar retailer, and this has already started to become commonplace among retail organisations (Poloian, 2013:192; Prinsloo, 2013:16).

It is evident that retail organisations have started to implement 'online' as part of their selling strategy, due to the fact that online sales are increasing in South Africa (refer to Chapter 1) which means that the online industry is growing and that consumers are increasingly engaging in online buying (Writer, 2015a). Moreover, Chaston (2015:61) and Fraunhofer IAO (n.d.) maintain that retail organisations that have not added an online store to their selling strategy are falling behind.

It is critical that both retail organisations and consumers should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of operating an e-tail store and buying from an e-tailer. The following section will emphasise the advantages and disadvantages for both e-tailers and consumers.

### 2.3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of e-tailing

Although e-tailing holds many advantages for both the e-tailer and the consumer, it also holds various disadvantages for both. It is critical that e-tailers and consumers should be aware of the advantages as well as the disadvantages that e-tailing entails. As can be seen in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 there are a range of advantages and disadvantages for e-tailers and consumers. Table 2.2 below provides a summary of the various advantages and disadvantages for e-tailers, based on the literature of Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:243).

**Table 2.2: Advantages and disadvantages of e-tailing for the e-tailer**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Online stores are always open (24/7).</li><li>▪ It is relatively easy for online stores to reach both mass and niche markets.</li><li>▪ Online selling offers organisations many potential opportunities to grow due to the fact that online is still relatively 'new' to the market.</li><li>▪ E-tailers that have an online presence will be able to create brand awareness at a local and an international level.</li><li>▪ Websites have the ability to expand across geographic areas and demographic markets for both small and large e-tailers.</li><li>▪ Brick-and-mortar stores and direct marketing organisations are 'boosted' when an online store is added to their selling strategy.</li><li>▪ E-tailers have the advantage of developing a proper database which enables data-mining facilities, creating awareness of customer behaviour and helps in the development of more personalised programmes for customers.</li><li>▪ Setting up an e-store costs less than setting up a physical store, especially for small retailers, and therefore overall costs such as rent, employee costs, operational costs and data-collection costs are reduced.</li><li>▪ E-mails enable e-tailers to contact all customers immediately about promotions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Consumers lack the opportunity to touch, feel, fit, smell and interact physically with products which can influence sales negatively.</li><li>▪ Some consumers do not accept the technological aspects of online shopping, especially due to the fact that it is still evolving and constantly changing.</li><li>▪ Consumers are worried about the security and privacy aspects of shopping online, and are therefore not partaking in it.</li><li>▪ Product misrepresentation due to poor-quality, unreliable pictures and not updating product information regularly is possible, and can have a negative impact on online sales.</li><li>▪ The lack of an efficient search engine can result in consumers struggling to find the e-tailer's e-store.</li><li>▪ Economic factors, such as currency exchange rates, taxes, tariffs, transport and shipping are challenging, especially when developing international markets.</li><li>▪ Channel conflict can occur when manufacturers and suppliers bypass e-tailers by developing their own e-stores.</li></ul>

and customer service-related information, at a relatively low cost.	
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Source: Adapted from Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244)

The disadvantages identified above may have a negative impact on online sales (Dent, 2014:243). It is therefore critical that e-tailers should be aware of these disadvantages and develop solutions to reduce the impact of the disadvantages and make it as convenient, safe, secure and informative as possible for online consumers.

Table 2.3 below summarises the advantages and disadvantages of e-tailing for the consumers, based on the literature of Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244).

**Table 2.3: Advantages and disadvantages of e-tailing for consumers**

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The convenience of shopping in the comfort of one's house or office 24/7 365 days of the year, and therefore saving time by shopping online.</li> <li>▪ Consumers indicated that bigger savings are experienced when purchasing online.</li> <li>▪ A wider variety of products and services are available to choose from.</li> <li>▪ It is also easier for consumers to do research on products, compare prices, read customer and e-tailer reviews, socialise and shop with friends, as links and/or pictures can be sent between friends.</li> <li>▪ Consumers mentioned that shopping online reduces shopping-related hassles and risks, such as struggling to find parking, traffic, crowded shops or crime, as these aspects are all problems that are associated with shopping at brick-and-mortar retail stores and malls.</li> <li>▪ E-tailing provides consumers with the opportunity to extend their shopping 'area' by shopping internationally for specific products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consumers need to surrender their perceived and actual privacy regarding the release of financial and other personal information, such as addresses, credit card details, and telephone numbers.</li> <li>▪ Consumers face the possibility of credit-card fraud or account-number theft via data cracks.</li> <li>▪ It is sometimes difficult for consumers to validate e-tailers, as any company or person can set up an e-store and 'sell' products.</li> <li>▪ Technological problems can also occur, such as slow or irregular broadcasts or too many clicks to find what is needed, which can then irritate consumers.</li> <li>▪ Consumers can easily get frustrated with distribution difficulties, such as untimely delivery, wrong items being delivered, or inconvenient return policies.</li> <li>▪ Consumers find the lack of being able to physically touch and feel products, try on apparel items, smell a fragrance or taste something, frustrating and it prevents some consumers from shopping online.</li> <li>▪ It can sometimes be time-consuming to search for products online on various different e-stores, and it can therefore take more time than to go to a mall.</li> <li>▪ Consumers might feel overwhelmed by the many available online choices</li> </ul>

	compared with that in stores or catalogues.
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Source: Adapted from Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244)

Many of the disadvantages of e-tailing as experienced by consumers still occur on a regular basis, however retailers/e-tailers have started to address these disadvantages, for instance, developing and introducing safer payment systems, such as PayPal, and also providing consumers the option to do an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) (Poloian, 2013:193). More e-tailers are also offering free delivery and a simplified returns process, which also makes it easier for e-shoppers (Walker, 2015:2).

Some international apparel e-tailers have started to create e-stores that enable e-shoppers to add their measurements to a 3D mannequin and mix-and-match apparel items to see the style and fit on 'their' bodies. This innovation has contributed to a reduced risk of buying apparel items that do not fit properly (Dent, 2014:244; Poloian, 2013:195), however this innovation has not yet been implemented in South Africa.

As indicated above, the disadvantages associated with e-tailing for both the e-tailer and consumer are related to the risks associated with online purchases, especially when personal information and credit card details need to be provided. As online sales increase, the risks associated with online sales increase, and are a major concern for the majority of online users. The risks associated with online sales are discussed below.

#### **2.3.4 Online risks**

Security is a major factor and reason for concern for both the consumer and the e-tailer when it comes to the Internet. It is critical for online marketers to know about and understand the relevant security issues and risks to enable them to effectively manage online actions and processes (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012:137). Although e-tailers do have control over online security measures, the risk increases when it comes to doing business and communicating online with consumers, as the control factor that e-tailers used to have, decreases.

The following are the major security risks that are involved in an online transaction from a consumer to an e-tailer's point of view (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012:137):

- Private and confidential details and/or passwords that are accessed on a user's computer, for example, through keylogging software or malware.
- Transaction or credit card details which are stolen in transit, for example, through 'packet sniffing' software.
- Consumer's credit card details which are stolen from an e-tailer's server, for example, by hacking the server.
- Consumers' details which are accessed by either the e-tailer's employees or a hacker who is in the building and has used social engineering techniques to find the information.
- Either the e-tailer or the consumer may not be who they claim to be and an innocent party can be drawn into fraudulent trading situation.

It is critical that e-tailers should be aware of the above-mentioned risks, and implement measures to eliminate the risks due to online security issues as far as possible to make the online journey as memorable and safe as possible for e-shoppers. E-tailers should ensure that they create online trust, as online trust will eliminate some of the risks associated. Chaston (2015:193) indicated that online trust leads to commitment which, in turn, leads to loyalty. The section below focuses on online trust.

### **2.3.5 Online trust**

According to Chaston (2015:193), online trust leads to commitment which then leads to loyalty. However, this is not as easy as it sounds, as with online purchases, the physical reassurance that consumers experience when purchasing from a store, or talking to someone over the phone, is non-existing. The prevalence of stories of fraud and security problems make the situation worse (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012:89), and it is therefore critical for e-tailers to reassure e-shoppers about the trustworthiness of their site, store, products and so forth.

Common methods or techniques used by e-tailers to reassure consumers about the trustworthiness of their site and e-store include, but are not limited to, the reputation of the brand, the familiarity of the brand name, the e-tailer's return policy, the country of origin of the brand, consumers' past experience of the brand, the promotional activities used by the e-tailer, and consumers' recommendations (Chaston, 2015:193; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012:89). E-tailers that manage to implement these

methods and techniques in their e-stores (websites), will increase consumers' online trust.

According to Chaston (2015:193), online trust is, in some instances, similar to off-line trust, for example, consumers that are satisfied with a purchase decision they made, have an increased likelihood of buying again. However, the Internet has created unclear and unreliable circumstances with regards to issues such as purchasing products without past experiences or the ability to examine (touch and feel) the products. Due to the lack of touch and feel, it is critical for e-tailers to ensure that they build trust into their online operations and ensure online consumers of their trustworthiness. Chaston (2015:193) indicated that there is a tendency among online consumers to prefer to buy only well-known brands that are supplied by known e-tailers that consumers have started to trust due to past experiences. Consequently, well-known brands have managed to achieve higher online sales, and therefore demand a higher price in relation to their lesser-known competitors.

According to Chaston (2015:193), for trust to exist, consumers need to believe that the e-tailer will deliver the products and services as expected. Furthermore, consumers are inclined to trust large, well-known e-tailers more than smaller e-tailers (Chaston, 2015:193). Chaston (2015:193) also indicated that the characteristics of online security and privacy are critical factors that lead to online consumer trust. However, it is believed that consumers' major concerns about online security and risks will start decreasing, as consumers are becoming more experienced in online shopping and are also trusting e-tailers more.

It is important to understand e-consumer transactions, specifically focusing on the reasons for and against purchasing online in South Africa. These will be focused on in the section below.

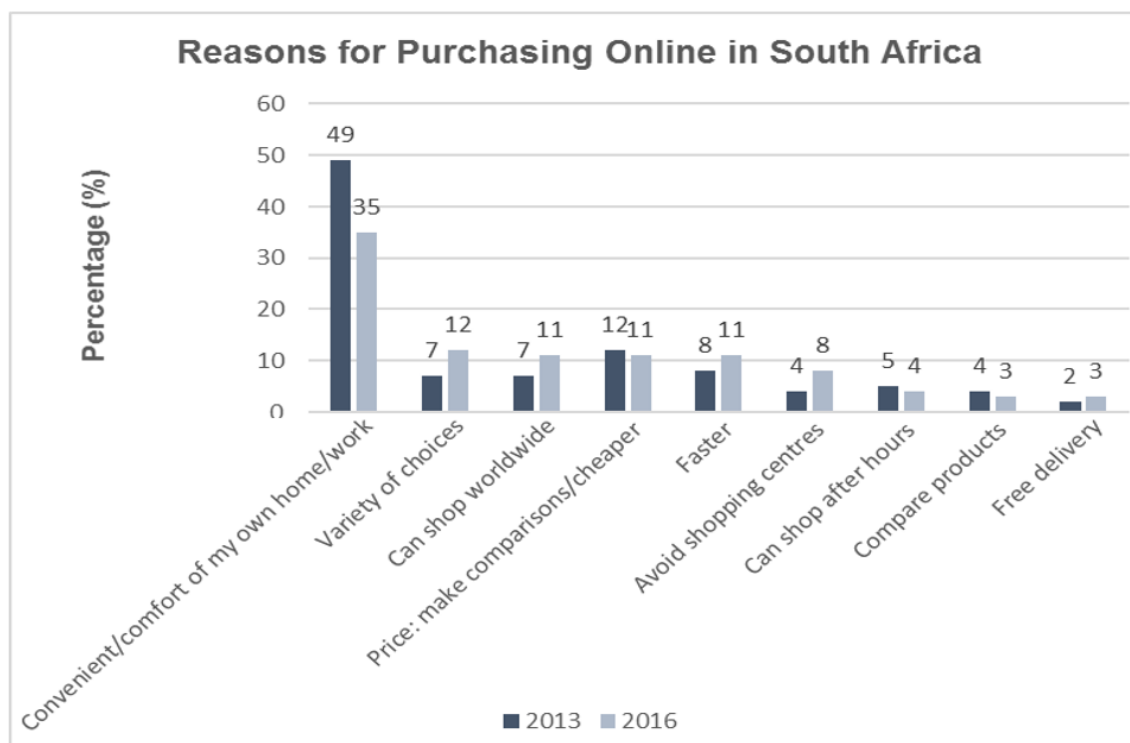
## **2.4 E-CONSUMER TRANSACTIONS**

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012:73) indicated that the number of internet users that purchase online products differs significantly based on their characteristics, demographic profile, the product category and the past experiences they had. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012:73) further indicated that there have also been various

forecasts about the development of e-tailing and how it might 'boost' the demand for online transactions.

However, it is undeniable that increases in e-transactions are due to the convenience of purchasing from one's home or office, whereas not seeing, feeling or touching the product lead to decreases in e-transactions (Prinsloo, 2013:9).

Research done by Prinsloo (2016:5; 2013:9) highlights various reasons why South African consumers are for and against purchasing merchandise online. Prinsloo's findings are illustrated in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 below.

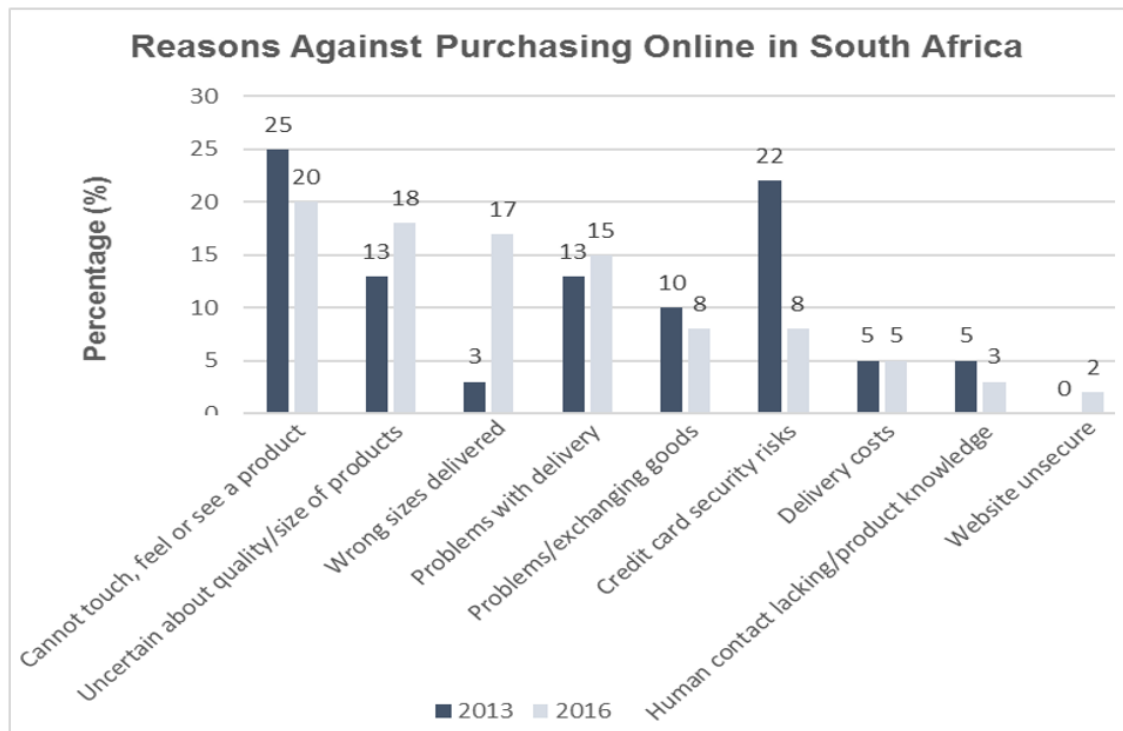


**Figure 2.2: Reasons for purchasing online in SA**

Source: Adapted from Prinsloo (2016:5; 2013:9)

Figure 2.2 above presents the reasons for purchasing online, while Figure 2.3 below presents the reasons against purchasing online.

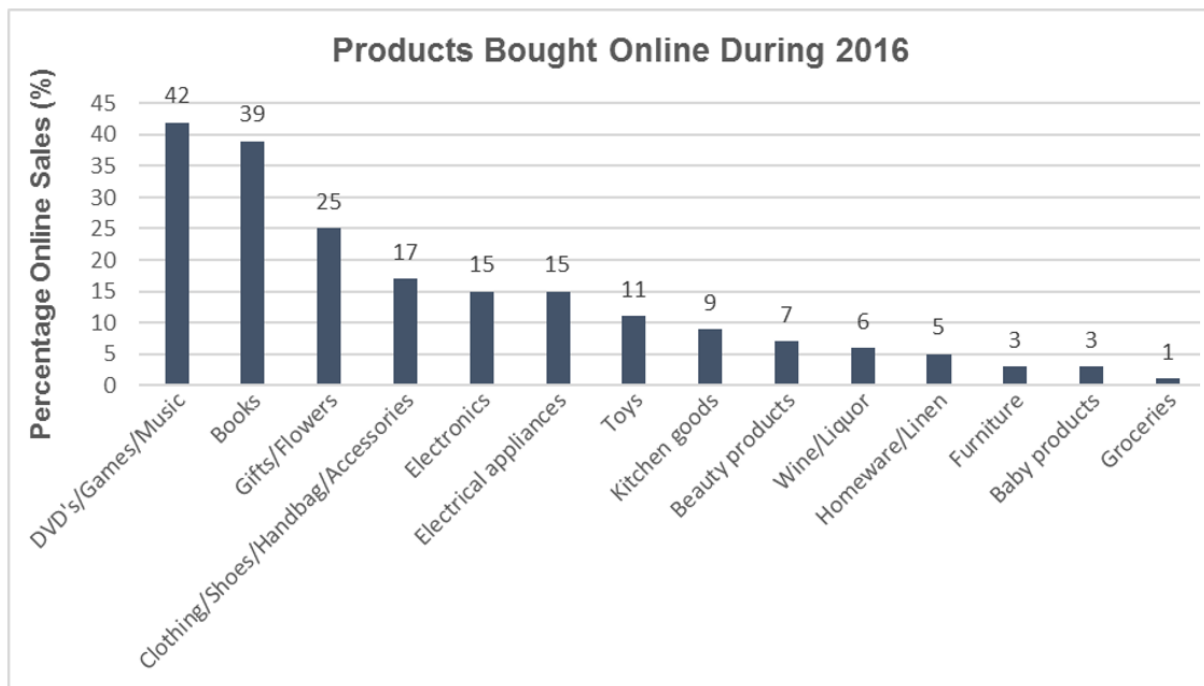




**Figure 2.3: Reasons against purchasing online in SA**

Source: Adapted from Prinsloo (2016:5; 2013:9)

Prinsloo (2016:6) further indicated during 2016, the products most frequently bought online in South Africa were DVDs, music, games, books, gifts, and flowers (Figure 2.4). Although apparel (clothing, shoes), electronics, electrical appliances and toys are also popular products which are bought online, the in-store sales of these products are still higher than their online sales, due to the lack of seeing and touching the products. Figure 2.4 below depicts the products bought online in South Africa.



**Figure 2.4: Products bought online during 2016**

Source: Adapted from Prinsloo (2016:6)

It is critical that e-tailers should be aware of three key aspects that could have a direct influence on consumers' e-transactions, and indirectly influence their buying behaviour (Chaston, 2015:184). The three key aspects are:

- **transaction services** which refers to security, product guarantees, safety, privacy and service;
- **convenience** which refers to e-store speed, freedom from problems and the presence of sensory experiences, for instance, the human senses; and
- **merchandise choices** which refers to product information, comparative shopping opportunities and product line choices.

E-tailers that manage to address and incorporate these three aspects, namely, transaction services, convenience and merchandise choices, in their e-store might have an advantage above their competitors, as e-shoppers might regard the e-store as being more trustworthy (refer to Section 2.3.5) which can lead to an increase in online sales (Chaston, 2015:184).

For e-tailers to be successful in the online market, which means there is a growing increase in e-transactions by reaching a larger online audience, e-tailers need to have a well-designed plan of action, also known as an 'e-tail strategy', that will give the e-

tailer a clear indication of what they're planning to do and how they're planning on doing it. An e-tailer without a carefully designed strategy is setting up for failure (Davey, 2014). The section below therefore focuses on the e-tail strategy.

## **2.5 E-TAIL STRATEGY OVERVIEW**

Due to the technological advancement of the Internet, the set-up, launch, and update of e-stores has become extremely easy and cost-effective for new and current e-tailers. However, Davey (2014) indicated that the dynamic and fast-changing e-environment also presents various challenges, and the solution is to implement a strategic approach to the online presence that is able to adapt to the ever-changing retail industry.

An e-tail strategy can be described as a holistic marketing plan for products or services to reach and influence the targeted consumers (MBAskool.com, 2016). A retail strategy includes everything from the choice of the types of retail channels available to use for products, to the prices for products, as well as how to display the products in-store or on an e-store (MBAskool.com, 2016). According to Cossin (n.d.:134), an e-tail strategy is defined as "... a statement identifying the e-tailers target market, the format the e-tailer plans to use to satisfy the target market's needs, and the bases upon which the e-tailer plans to build a sustainable competitive advantage".

Similarly, according to the BusinessDictionary.com (2016), a strategy refers to a marketing plan that indicates how an organisation aims to offer its products or services to consumers and also influence the purchasing intentions. Furthermore, Collier (2013) and CioIndex (2008) indicate that an e-strategy refers to an e-business strategy which includes all types of businesses, such as retailers/e-tailers, organisations, and suppliers, that conduct business over the Internet.

An e-strategy defines both short-and-long-term goals, as well as the overall business goals, and involves critical, careful and skilled planning. An effective e-tail strategy will enable an e-tailer to show their products on their website in such a way that consumers' attention will be drawn towards price discounts, product information, e-tailer incentives and signs (Cossin, n.d.:134).

According to Sandow and Yang (2010:14), there are various types of strategies that organisations can implement, depending on the goal that needs to be achieved. To name but a few, typical marketing-related strategies can focus on:

- Advertising and promotion strategies which enable e-tailers to communicate with their target market in a more effective way (Sandow & Yang, 2010:14).
- Site design, also referred to as a website or an e-store, which is a marketing strategy that enables e-tailers to show and sell products directly to consumers (Sandow & Yang, 2010:16).
- Providing accurate and effective information to consumers at all times is an ongoing strategy that e-tailers need to focus on, otherwise consumers will switch to another brand and/or product (Sandow & Yang, 2010:16).
- After-sales, which is another strategy that is critical for future sales, as consumers' past shopping experiences influence their expectation, and consumers will quickly tell a friend of a bad or an exceptional good experience by means of word-of-mouth (Sandow & Yang, 2010:17).

For the purpose of this study, based on the stated objectives in Chapter 1, e-tailers need to implement an e-tail strategy to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. One of the strategies that e-tailers can implement to increase and stimulate online sales is to develop and implement online visual merchandising themes in their e-stores. Online visual merchandising themes refer to various methods, such as using specific colours, sounds, navigation tools, product presentation, and product information. These methods are implemented to provide the shopper with a pleasant and memorable shopping experience and to influence their spending.

E-tailers that manage to implement the appropriate online visual merchandising themes successfully will have a successful e-strategy. Online visual merchandising themes are the core of the current study, and will therefore be discussed in detail in the next chapter, Chapter 3.

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to discuss the e-tail environment in a nutshell. The chapter commenced with the introduction that provided a short discussion of the traditional marketing environment which consists of the micro-, market- and macro

environment. The discussion also focused on how the traditional marketing environment had changed into a more technological-oriented marketing environment.

The terms used throughout the chapter were discussed in the form of a glossary in Section 2.2, to enable a common understanding of all the terms and concepts used in the study. This was followed by a discussion of the e-tail environment which focused on the definition of e-tail, the various e-tail formats, the advantages and disadvantages of e-tailing for both the e-tailer and the consumer, the risks associated with online, how to create online trust, and the types of online transactions in South Africa.

The chapter ended with a short discussion of the concept of an e-strategy which focused on the definition and purpose of an e-strategy, and how an e-strategy needs to be implemented in the form of online visual merchandising themes to increase and stimulate online sales.

The following chapter focuses on the online visual merchandising themes, as these themes need to be implemented to ensure a successful e-strategy that focuses on increasing and stimulating online sales. The different types of online visual merchandising themes are specifically emphasised, as well the design of an effective e-store that will entice e-shoppers to browse, and ultimately purchase products via the e-store.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **ONLINE VISUAL MERCHANDISING**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Visual merchandising is not only used in-store to make merchandise look attractive for consumers, it is also about the selling of merchandise through a visual medium (Pegler, 2012:1). Pegler (2012:1) mentioned that visual merchandising enable stores to say "... this is who we are and what we stand for". It is critical for retailers to have a good understanding of visual merchandising concepts and theory, as retailers need to ensure that their merchandise is presented in an effective way that will 'speak to' and influence all of the consumers' senses.

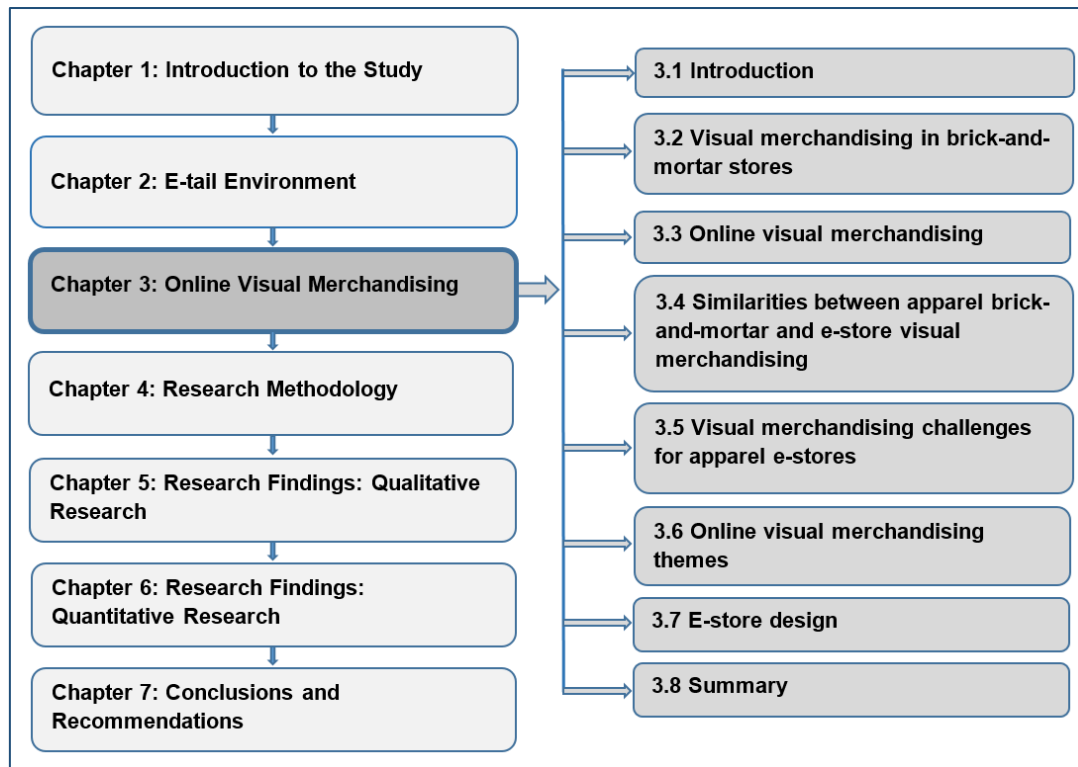
In a visual merchandising setting, an e-tailer needs to communicate visually through an e-store (website), unlike brick-and-mortar stores that are able to appeal to all the human senses. Therefore, the appropriate design of the e-store is crucial for e-tailers who have limited control over the senses of the shopper (Wu, 2014:13). Although the characteristics of e-stores differ from that of brick-and-mortar stores, visual merchandising for both these types of stores is aimed at drawing consumers into the store and influencing them to make a purchase (Wu, 2014:13).

It is important that e-tailers should ensure that the visual merchandising themes used in their e-store are effective and appeal to consumers, as it is easy for consumers to switch from one e-store to another (Ha *et al.*, 2007:477). To prevent this from happening, it is essential that e-tailers keep their customers interested in their merchandise by enticing the customers to stay on the site, so that they ultimately purchase merchandise.

This chapter commences with a brief discussion of visual merchandising in the traditional brick-and-mortar stores, followed by a discussion of online visual merchandising, which is the main aim of this chapter. Aspects such as the challenges associated with online visual merchandising and the online visual merchandising themes are also discussed, followed by a discussion of how to effectively design an e-store to maximise the effect of online visual merchandising aimed at increasing sales.

All the sections will relate to the apparel industry, as it is the focus point of the study, as indicted in Chapters 1 and 2.

Figure 3.1 shows the overall layout of the study, including where Chapter 3 fits in.



**Figure 3.1: Structure of Chapter 3**

Source: Author's own compilation

As depicted in Figure 3.1, the following section discusses visual merchandising in brick-and-mortar stores.

## 3.2 VISUAL MERCHANDISING IN BRICK-AND-MORTAR STORES

The meaning of the term visual merchandising as applied in brick-and-mortar stores, is clear: it aims to present merchandise in a more visually appealing manner to generate interest and sales (Hassan, 2013). For example, Pegler (2012:2) postulated "... we show in order to sell".

The ultimate aim of visual merchandising is to generate sales by displaying merchandise and concepts in the best possible way to enhance the shopping environment (Donnellan, 2014: 379). According to Berman and Evans (2013: 491), retailers that engage in visual merchandising use a mixture of atmospheric themes (colours, lighting, scents, temperature, textures, and so forth) in their efforts to create

a certain in-store 'style or feel'. Further, retailers also use visual merchandising to appropriately display merchandise which stimulates shopping behaviour and enhances the physical in-store environment (Berman & Evans, 2013: 491).

Visual merchandising can be defined as all aspects within a retail store that include, but are not limited to, the layout and design, product merchandising, housekeeping, lighting, music, price tags, signage and graphics, window displays, props, the colour of walls, and the fixtures used to display merchandise (Berman & Evans, 2013:491). Hassan (2013) defined visual merchandising "... as the physical presentation of products", as well as the management of all physical elements within a store to create the right image.

Similarly, Bhalla and Anuraag (2010:2) postulate that visual merchandising refers to the "... art of showcasing or presenting merchandise" to consumers, as it places emphasis on the merchandise, it puts the merchandise in the right perspective, it educates the consumers, it creates a desire within the consumer and finally boosts the selling process. It is further mentioned by Bhalla and Anuraag (2010:2) that visual merchandising can be regarded as a type of language that a retailer uses to communicate their offerings to the customers in the store.

For the purpose of this study, visual merchandising is defined as creating a pleasurable and joyous in-store environment by means of implementing enticing layouts, colours, lighting, fixtures and props to show customers what is being offered with the aim of increasing current and potential sales.

It is clear from the given definitions that visual merchandising consists of various themes that according to Bhalla and Anuraag (2010:2) and Chandra (2012), have the ability to:

- creatively and effectively educate consumers about the merchandise on offer;
- enable a successful selling process, from browsing to buying;
- establish a creative medium wherein merchandise is displayed in a lifelike environment, thus creating strong impact and recall value;
- develop the right context in which the merchandise should be sold;
- draw consumers' attention; and
- allow consumers to match their needs with the merchandise.

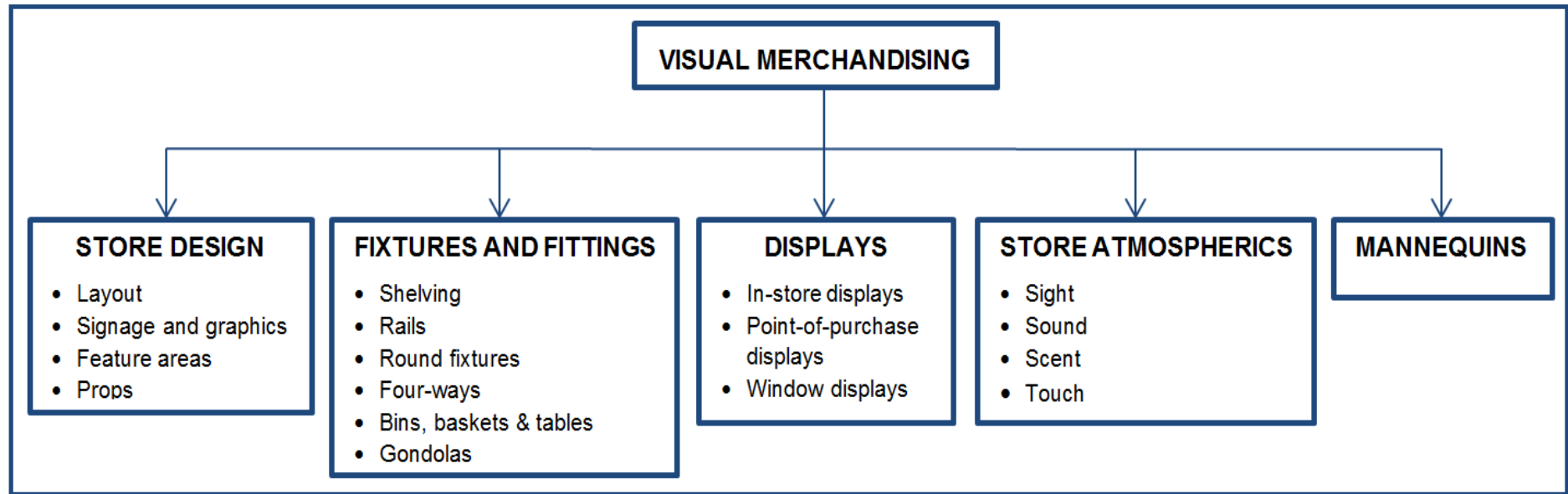


The above definitions of visual merchandising in brick-and-mortar stores allow for the identification of various visual merchandising themes that are used to establish and enhance the overall image of a store (Berman & Evans; 2013:504–506 and Dunne & Lusch, 2008:458).

Figure 3.2 (on the next page) shows the main themes and categories of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores that contribute towards creating and enhancing an overall effective in-store environment and store image (Bell & Ternus, 2006:20; Levy *et al.*, 2012:487).

All five of the themes listed in the figure, namely, store design, fixtures and fittings, displays, atmospherics and mannequins, consist of a number of sub-themes which form the elements of visual merchandising that contribute to the overall store image.

The themes as depicted in Figure 3.2 (on the next page), together with the categories of each of these identified themes, will be briefly discussed in the section below to provide the foundation on which online visual merchandising is built.



**Figure 3.2: Visual merchandising themes for brick-and-mortar stores**

Source: Adapted from Bell and Ternus (2006:20); Levy *et al.* (2012: 487-492); Wiid (2012); Hefer (2017:87)

### 3.2.1 Store design

As indicated in Figure 3.2, the first theme of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores is store design. Store design can be described as “... the interior design of commercial premises where goods are sold to the public. Retailers aim to make these commercial spaces more appealing and inviting to consumers through store design” (Burns, 2012).

The main purpose of store design is to aid in the execution of the retailer’s marketing strategy (Nell, 2013:17). It is important that the design of the store is consistent and that it reinforces the retailer’s merchandise strategy by meeting the needs of their target market and creating a sustainable competitive advantage (Levy *et al.*, 2012:468; Nell, 2013:17). The store design of each type of apparel retail store will be different, as it depends on the type of merchandise sold, as well as its image (Morgan, 2008:34).

Store design, according to Morgan (2008:30), consists of four main categories, namely, layout, signage and graphics, feature areas, and props that in combination create an effective consuming environment. The categories, as indicated in Figure 3.2 are briefly discussed as follows:

- **Layout**, as a category of store design, refers to the effective flow of used space, how it controls and directs the in-store traffic and sales productivity of a retail store to ensure that consumers are comfortable while shopping and that the overall appearance of a store is attractive (Nell, 2013:17; Levy *et al.*, 2012:473). The layout of a store is, in turn, determined by three aspects: firstly, by the type of products being offered; secondly, by the size and structure of the store, and thirdly, by the type of fixtures that are used in-store (University of South Africa, 2017:136-139)
- **Signage and graphics** is the second category of store design. The purpose of using signage and graphics in a store is to assist consumers in finding specific merchandise and departments in a store. Effective signage and graphics attract the attention of shoppers and also transfer the brand identity, thus influencing the consumer’s first impression of what they will find inside the store (Hefer, 2012:98). Signage and graphics can therefore be defined as any drawings, paintings or words that create a graphic display that can be used by retailers to help consumers to locate certain products and departments (Nell, 2013:17).

- **Feature areas** refers to dedicated areas in a store that are specifically designed to grab consumers' attention (Levy *et al.*, 2012:479), and they can also guide and direct consumers through a store and influence their buying behaviour. Feature areas include window displays, entrances, freestanding displays, promotional aisles or areas, walls, dressing rooms, point-of-purchase counters and props (Nell, 2013:17).
- **Props** refers to all 'items/objects' that are inside a store, and includes items such as flowers, balls, boxes, and vases (Bell & Ternus, 2012:146). However, this excludes floor fixtures, the actual merchandise and the mannequins that a store uses to display the merchandise (Bell & Ternus, 2012:146). According to Morgan (2008:62), props are items that visually support the merchandise sold by the retailer, and can include any of the following depending on the type of store design: furniture, paintings or any art objects, artificial snow or grass, flowers, balls, boxes, ribbons, banners, baskets, decorative screens and panels, floor coverings, paper, and cardboard, posters, flags, pots, vases, pedestals, textiles, and many more (Hefer, 2017:106).

The second theme of visual merchandising, as indicated in Figure 3.2, is fixtures and fittings which are discussed in the next section.

### 3.2.2 Fixtures and fittings

The second theme of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores is fixtures and fittings. Fixtures can be described as all the different types of equipment used to display merchandise (Levy *et al.*, 2012:471). Retailers use fixtures to hold and display the merchandise that is on offer, as well as to direct the traffic flow in a store (Nell, 2013:18).

Retailers commonly use fixtures such as shelving, rails, round fixtures, four-ways, bins, baskets and tables, and gondolas to display merchandise in a store and also to create the right image and atmosphere in a store.

It is important that the type of fixture should fit in with the other design elements, such as flooring and lighting to add to and create the correct image and atmosphere in the store (Levy *et al.*, 2012:487).

The categories of fixtures and fittings, as indicated in Figure 3.2, are briefly discussed below:

- **Shelving** comes in various forms and sizes, namely, small, medium and large, on which to display the merchandise on offer to consumers. Most of the shelving types are made up of a number of fixture parts that provide flexibility in terms of fixture sizing, as the shape, outline and structure can be changed or formed as needed. Shelving can also come in smaller parts, as either stand-alone units that can be placed anywhere on the floor, or it can be placed against the walls (Varley, 2014:224).
- **Rails** can be mounted onto walls, or be combined into a free-standing fixture to show the available merchandise that is on offer to the consumers. The rails are adjustable and therefore different heights can be chosen by the retailers (Varley, 2014:225).
- **Round fixtures** are, as the name implies, round and stand on a pedestal and the merchandise is therefore displayed in a circle. Round fixtures tend to carry more merchandise than rails and take up less floor space. Round fixtures are suitable when showing different colours and styles in the same category, but they are not very space-efficient, as consumers need to access it from all sides (Levy *et al.*, 2012:487).
- **Four-ways** have two crossbars that sit vertically on a pedestal, also aiming to show merchandise in an effective manner. The fixture can carry a large amount of merchandise and allows the consumers to view the entire garment (Levy *et al.*, 2012:487).
- **Bins and baskets** are generally used to carry larger product quantities, for example, socks, scarves, flip-flops, and so forth. It is an effective fixture to use for small or promotional items, as the bins and baskets can either be filled with one type of product, or it can be different types of the same product type, or it can be a variety of products at the same price and through which consumers have to search (Varley, 2014:226).
- **Gondolas** are a versatile four-sided capacity fixture that carries folded or stackable merchandise on both sides (Bell & Ternus, 2012:106). Gondolas are used to display linen, towels, and houseware items in department stores. Although they

can be used for apparel items, it can be difficult for consumers to view apparel items as they need to be folded up and stacked on the shelves (Levy *et al.*, 2012:487).

Displays as the third theme of visual merchandising, based on Figure 3.2, are discussed in the section below.

### 3.2.3 Displays

Displays are the third theme of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores. The term 'displays' refers to the way in which merchandise is presented and/or arranged on fixtures and fittings to attract the consumer's attention. The purpose of a display is therefore to show and promote the merchandise that is offered by the store (Wiid, 2012:171). Displays consist of four categories, namely, on-shelf displays, off-shelf displays, point of purchase displays and window displays, and are briefly explained below.

- **On-shelf displays** refer to the more common or general type of in-store displays that show different types of products in a logical manner (Varley, 2014:231). On-shelf displays in a store are regarded as a visual merchandising requirement, as all products need to be displayed in some form or manner to attract the attention of consumers, and also to inform consumers of what is available in the store.
- **Off-shelf displays** are used to create an impression among consumers of how certain merchandise items will look like in 'real-life', or it involves that certain merchandise items are placed next to other merchandise items to influence complementary purchases, for example, a blouse with matching jewellery. Off-shelf displays are not used in the normal selling process, as it is mainly used to create a visual impact on consumers. Off-shelf displays are arranged in a creative way and are only changed by the visual merchandising team (Hefer, 2012:95).
- **Point-of-purchase (POP) displays** are regarded as the most effective display type that a self-service retailer can use. POP displays used to be associated with products that are sold at the checkout counter, however, today POP displays can be displays or fixtures that are created to assist retailers in the selling of their merchandise (Hefer, 2012:100). POP displays are commonly used to encourage impulse buying and can be in any of the following forms: posters, price tags,

samples of products, video advertising spots, bins, baskets, or anything else that draws the consumer's attention to the product (Wiid, 2012:177).

- **Window displays**, as the name suggests, refer to windows facing the outside of a retail store and which are used by retailers to display the type of merchandise that they offer, with the aim of drawing consumers into their store. Window displays are regarded as an extremely effective tool to communicate to consumers the type of retailer, the image of the retailer, and the type of merchandise that the retailer offer, all this with the aim of creating interest within the consumers (Morgan, 2008:42). Creative and interesting window displays will most likely bring people that were walking past the store to a stop, and ultimately have such an influence on them that they want to enter the store (Hefer, 2012:104).

The fourth theme of visual merchandising, as indicated in Figure 3.2, is atmospherics which is discussed in the section below.

#### **3.2.4 Store atmospherics**

The fourth theme of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores as shown in Figure 3.2 is atmospherics. The term 'atmospherics' refers to the physical characteristics of a store that are used to develop an image that aims to attract consumers (Berman & Evans, 2010:508). Atmospherics is a word that is used by retailers to describe categories such as lighting, colour, music, aromas, temperature, and so forth, that appeal to the five human senses (sight, touch, scent, sound and taste) and that contribute to the overall in-store environment (Bell & Ternus, 2012:24). Bell and Ternus (2012:44) state that atmospheric themes have the ability to influence consumers' feelings about being in, and staying in a retail store, and the longer consumers stay in a store, the higher the likelihood they will buy (Nell, 2013:21).

The atmospheric theme used in most apparel retail stores refers to sight, such as colours and lighting, sound, such as music and noise, touch, such as temperature and texture, and scent, such as fragrances. These categories are briefly discussed below.

- **Sight** refers to the act of seeing and forming a perception of specific things or objects by using the eyes (Nell, 2013:22). It is considered as the most dominant sense and it is also the most tempting (Hultén, 2011:259). Kotler (2001:51) classified sight as all the visual elements, such as the colours, lighting, shades and shapes that retailers use to create an appealing atmosphere. Ninety percent of in-

store environmental cues are taken in through sight, due to the fact that many in-store cues in the retail setting are visually communicated (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward, 2003:145; Nell, 2013:23), for example, colours and lighting.

- **Sound** refers to a specific feeling that is produced by the stimulation of the hearing organ through vibrations sent out in the air or any other medium, such as the sound of music that can be heard (Nell, 2013:27). Kotler (2001:51) classified sound as the volume or pitch of music that retailers use to create a pleasing atmosphere. Hultén, Broweus and Van Dijk (2009:67) stated that “... sound affects our mood and psychological state, alerts us to danger, and promotes peace of mind for the soul”. Sound has always been an important aspect everywhere in the world for both individuals as well as organisations, as people attach specific meanings to different types of sounds and music genres (Nell, 2013:27). Sound can therefore be regarded as an important source of motivation and information in relation to making an association with specific organisations, stores, brands or products (Nell, 2013:27; Gobé, 2009:73).
- **Scent** refers to any specific or often agreeable smell, such as fragrances, or odours (Nell, 2013:30). Hultén *et al.* (2009:41) proclaim that “our search for pleasure and daily well-being is most often led by our nose”. According to Gobé (2009:99) scent is the strongest of all five senses, and it has the best ability to evoke consumer emotions. Scent furthermore has the ability to reach people on a conscious, as well as on an unconscious level, and it takes only one smell to stimulate a person’s senses and create a perception (Hultén *et al.*, 2009:56; Nell, 2013:30). Retail stores that manage to implement an appealing subtle scent will most probably influence consumers to stay longer in the store (Levy *et al.*, 2012:491).
- **Touch** refers to the tactile or tangible sense through which consumers can make physical contact with the surrounding world, and investigate three-dimensional (3D) objects (Kang, Boger, Back, & Madera, 2011:3). Touch makes it possible for consumers to remember how specific things/objects feel by only looking at it and thinking about it. Hultén *et al.* (2009:11) highlight the importance of making the physical form of merchandise available through which consumers will be able to interact with the merchandise by touching, squeezing and turning it upside down, as this will add to the overall in-store atmosphere (Nell, 2013:33). Merchandise, brands and store characteristics can be described through tactile sensory



expressions, such as materials and surfaces, and temperature and weight (Kang *et al.*, 2011:3).

The section below provides a brief description of the last theme of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores, mannequins.

### **3.2.5 Mannequins**

The fifth theme of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores, as depicted in Figure 3.2, is mannequins. A mannequin is a full-size representation of the human body that is mainly used in the promotion of apparel items (Hefer, 2012:93). Mannequins stand firmly for hours, days and months, in the same position and attitude and act as a silent salesperson (University of South Africa, 2017:152). Mannequins have been the trademark of window displays for many years, and they are regarded as the most effective and popular tool to introduce and present the latest fashion trends to the world (Morgan, 2008:182). Retailers that dress their mannequins in a fashionable and trendy way will create an outstanding display presentation that will create awareness and a desire among shoppers, which can lead to unplanned sales (Hefer, 2012:93). Therefore, mannequins are regarded as an apparel store's most valuable asset (Pegler, 2010:91).

The preceding discussion served as a brief background on the topic of visual merchandising and the themes and categories thereof in a brick-and-mortar retail outlet and how it can be used. Based on this discussion, it is clear that visual merchandising plays a critical role in creating a pleasant in-store environment to draw consumers into the store, to keep them in the store, and to create a desire to purchase planned and unplanned merchandise.

Wu (2014:13,139) indicated that although there are major differences between brick-and-mortar visual merchandising and online visual merchandising, the main goal of visual merchandising for both types of retailers is to draw consumers into the store/e-store and influence them to make a purchase. Wu (2014:13) also mentioned that although there are differences between brick-and-mortar visual merchandising and online visual merchandising, a number of themes and principles of visual merchandising stay the same for both.

The section below lays the foundation for online visual merchandising, and will commence with a discussion of the similarities between brick-and-mortar visual merchandising and online visual merchandising. Thereafter the challenges associated with e-store visual merchandising are discussed, followed by a discussion on e-store design.

### **3.3 ONLINE VISUAL MERCHANDISING**

Online visual merchandising refers to visual merchandising activities that are carried out online via an e-store (website) by an e-tailer (online retailer).

As indicated in Section 3.1 and 3.2, visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar and e-stores share the same goal of creating a pleasant 'in-store' environment aimed at increasing the planned and unplanned purchases by customers (Wu, 2014:13,139; McMullan, 2016).

The definition of visual merchandising for both brick-and-mortar and e-stores is very similar and refers to the display of merchandise in such a way that it creates an awareness and influences consumers to make a purchase (McKenzie, 2012). Hassan (2013) indicated that online visual merchandising refers to the presentation of merchandise by arranging all the online themes, such as colours, music, pictures, wording, navigation functions and videos on the e-store to create the right image, and influence sales. In simpler terms, online visual merchandising describes how an e-tailer display and present the merchandise on their e-store (Indium Online, 2009:1).

Unlike brick-and-mortar stores where the visual merchandising themes can appeal to all five of the consumers' senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and scent), e-stores rely primarily on visual appeal through a computer screen, and secondly, on sound appeal through a speaker. This enables the e-store to appeal to the consumers' senses of sight and sound, which makes the visual and sound aspect of visual merchandising more important for e-tailers (Wu, 2014:12). It is therefore important for e-tailers to implement the themes of sight and sound in their e-store to ensure that their current and potential consumers are intrigued and satisfied by their merchandise.

E-tailers that manage to create an effective e-store that enables consumers to find what they are looking for in an easy and timely manner, can also increase the likelihood of consumers discovering additional items, and thus increasing sales.

Whereas, e-tailers that struggle to create an effective e-store are faced with the threat that consumers will easily leave the e-store and search for another e-store offering similar products (Koo & Park, 2017:37; Indium Online, 2009:1).

E-tailers that manage to create an effective, reliable and up-to-date e-store, will also add to the overall trustworthiness of their brand and store (Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:3). Despite the fact that brick-and-mortar visual merchandising appeals to all five the senses, while e-store visual merchandising appeals to only two of the senses, some similarities do exist and these similarities are discussed in the section below.

### **3.4 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN APPAREL BRICK-AND-MORTAR AND E-STORE VISUAL MERCHANDISING**

According to Wu (2014:13), Ha *et al.* (2007:479) and Kawaf and Tagg (2012:6), similarities do exist between visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores and e-stores. These authors indicated that although e-stores have some attributes that differ from those of brick-and-mortar stores, the main goal for both brick-and-mortar stores and e-stores is for consumers to enter the store, to enjoy the environment and to purchase merchandise.

Some similarities, as identified by Wu (2014:13), Ha *et al.* (2007:479) and Kawaf and Tagg (2012:6), include store layout and navigation, atmospheric elements such as music and colours, display items such as mannequins, and fixtures and fittings. These similarities are discussed in more detail below.

- Brick-and-mortar apparel retailers plan their store layouts and product departments in such a way as to enable consumers to find appropriate merchandise. The store layout, the various product departments (for example, men, women and children) and merchandise directories correspond to the layout of merchandise categories and the ease with which merchandise is found on an e-tailer's e-store. By using site maps or search engines, consumers are directed through the e-store that makes it more useful and accessible (user-friendly).
- Apparel brick-and-mortar stores grab the attention of consumers by playing in-store music, having unique merchandise presentations and creative promotional and window displays that aim to entice them to enter the store, or to browse around. In a similar way, e-stores use music, colourful images, signage and videos

showing merchandise when opening an e-store page which aim to grab the consumer's attention and interest, and which invite them to browse the site and which draw consumers into the e-store.

- Apparel brick-and-mortar stores use a variety of different types of fixtures and fittings and mannequins to present merchandise, while e-stores also present merchandise by making use of pictures and 'real-life' mannequins showing different colours and sizes, and providing the necessary information about the merchandise item.
- Apparel brick-and-mortar stores make use of themes, colours, signage and graphics to create the store's image. Similarly, e-tailers make use of various background colours, graphics and images on the e-store to create the e-store's/e-tailer's image.

Based on the similarities in visual merchandising as applied by apparel brick-and-mortar and e-stores, it is clear that both brick-and-mortar and e-stores have a similar purpose, in the sense of creating a pleasant in-store environment to influence consumer purchases.

However, despite the similarities in visual merchandising, various challenges are also associated with visual merchandising for e-stores. These challenges, together with possible solutions, where possible, are discussed in the following section.

### **3.5 VISUAL MERCHANDISE CHALLENGES FOR APPAREL E-STORES**

The types of challenges associated with apparel e-tailers are different from the challenges that brick-and-mortar apparel retailers face (Wu, 2014:3). The reason for this lies in the fact that e-tailers have very little control over the types of consumers visiting their e-store and for what reasons, as opposed to brick-and-mortar retailers that can observe and assist their consumers on a face-to-face basis. Some of the more important challenges that e-stores may experience include the following:

- Due to the fact that e-tailers have a larger and global geographical reach compared to brick-and-mortar retailers, consumers have a wider variety of apparel e-stores to choose from, and it is also easier for consumers to switch from one e-store to another to ensure that they find the merchandise item that they want at the best

price (Wu, 2014:3). It is therefore crucial for e-tailers to attract consumers' attention and to retain them to ensure that no switching of e-store occurs (Koo & Park, 2017:37).

- Although there has recently been an increase in e-tail sales for apparel merchandise, it is still a challenge to create an e-store experience that is similar to that which consumers experience in the brick-and-mortar in-store environment (Perry, Blazquez & Padilla, 2013:1).
- The apparel industry is regarded as a high-involvement product category, meaning that all apparel items need to be seen (colour, quality), tried on (fit) and touched (textures, quality) by consumers to be evaluated (Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:3; Park *et al.*, 2009:918; Kim & Lennon, 2009:413; Kakimdjanova & Park, 2005:308). The lack of the tangible aspect in an apparel e-store presents a major challenge for e-tailers, as it may obstruct consumers from making such purchases, due to the high risks involved for the consumers (Perry *et al.*, 2013:1; Kim & Lennon, 2009:413; Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:3).
- According to Kawaf and Tagg (2012:3), from the consumers' perspective, the return of apparel e-store purchases to the e-store is a challenge, as well as the lack of communication with e-store employees.
- In addition, from the consumers' perspectives the following are also obstacles: e-stores that have a confusing layout, or which are poorly designed, and which increase the consumer's frustration; inconvenient delivery time schedules; and having to pay for the delivery of items (Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:3).
- Apparel shopping is regarded among consumers as an important socialising and engaging experience that provides opportunities to see and be with others (Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:3). This remains a challenge for e-tailers, as consumers cannot share the 'physical' e-store experience with a friend, as they would in a brick-and-mortar store.

Koo and Park (2017:39), Park *et al.* (2009:918) and Swiger (2011) highlighted that the more information e-tailers can provide through the visual displays of apparel merchandise on e-stores, the higher the chances are that consumers will be more interested in purchasing merchandise from the e-stores. Visual displays that enable image enlargements (zoom facility) and garment integration (mix-and-match, which

refers to how different apparel items and colours would look together) with other apparel items, will clearly add to consumer information gathering and processing (Koo & Park, 2017:37; McKenzie, 2012). Park *et al.* (2009:918) further emphasised that if consumers are satisfied with the type and quantity of information provided by e-tailers on the e-stores, they are more inclined to make purchases, as the risks associated with buying from the e-stores has decreased.

Based on the challenges associated with online visual merchandising, as discussed above, it is critical that e-tailers should ensure that their e-store provides the shopper with sufficient detailed information about the merchandise so that some of the challenges that e-tailers face are reduced.

Various online visual merchandising themes were identified in literature and it can be valuable for e-tailers to incorporate these themes when designing their e-store to provide consumers with a similar experience to that of a brick-and-mortar store. The section below provides a discussion of the online visual merchandising themes that are available for e-tailers to use when designing their e-stores.

### **3.6 ONLINE VISUAL MERCHANDISING THEMES**

Based on the existing literature on online visual merchandising, various online visual merchandising themes have been identified (Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:8; Kim & Lennon, 2009:414; Kaikkonen, 2012:14; Ha & Stoel, 2011:205; Chang & Chen, 2008:821; Park *et al.*, 2009:920-925; Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014:87; Koo & Park, 2017:38-39 & Wu, 2014:19).

Table 3.1 provides a summary of the online visual merchandising themes that are available for e-tailers to use in creating an effective and efficient e-store that will reduce risks for consumers and provide them with a memorable and joyful experience.

**Table 3.1: Summary of online visual merchandising themes**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Online visual merchandising themes/cues</b>
Fatema Kawaf and Stephen Tagg	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Online path finding</b> (search engines, site maps and categorisation)</li> <li>▪ <b>Environment atmospherics</b> (music, video, display, background colours and colours surrounding the products)</li> <li>▪ <b>Manner of product presentation</b> (product view and display methods, colours and method of presentation, detailed views, swatch, and mix-and-match)</li> </ul>
Hyejeong Kim and Sharron J. Lennon	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Use of human model</b> (Presentation technique and display)</li> <li>▪ <b>Colour-swopping on clothing</b> (atmospheric element)</li> <li>▪ <b>Image enlargement</b> (Presentation technique)</li> </ul>
Tommi Kaikkonen	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Virtual layout and design</b> (Grid layout, free-form layout and racetrack layout)</li> <li>▪ <b>Virtual atmospherics</b> (Background colour, colour scheme, percentage of white space, background music, fonts, scent appeal, and touch appeal)</li> <li>▪ <b>Virtual theatrics</b> (Animation techniques, images, vividness and interactivity)</li> <li>▪ <b>Virtual social presence</b> (Web counter, comments from other visitors: reviews and crowding)</li> </ul>
Sejin Ha and Leslie Stoel	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Website content/functionality</b> (Time, navigation, layout and information provided)</li> <li>▪ <b>Customer service</b> (Responsiveness, shipping costs, willingness to help, timely responses and problem solving)</li> <li>▪ <b>Privacy/security</b> (Privacy is protected, safe transactions, trust and security)</li> <li>▪ <b>Experiential/atmospherics</b> (Fun, inviting and excitement)</li> </ul>
Hsin Hsin Chang and Su Wen Chen	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Website quality</b> (Technical adequacy, content quality, specific content and appearance)</li> <li>▪ <b>Website brand</b> (Trust and perceived risk)</li> </ul>
Hyun Hee Park, Qin Li and Jung Ok Jeon	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Convenience</b> (search tool, related website links, related category link and Codi-product link)</li> <li>▪ <b>Product presence</b> (Detailed size indication, textiles image, fibre content composition indication, sewing quality indication, price indication, colour information offer, detail indication and product stock indication)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Product information</b> (Size measurement explanation, coordination, manufacture place indication and product comparison information)</li> <li>▪ <b>Service</b> (No interest information, shipping cost indication, international shipping information, delivery term indication, return policy indication, selling agency information and custom-made service)</li> <li>▪ <b>Interest</b> (Promotion and advertising)</li> <li>▪ <b>Participation</b> (Bulletin board, purchase postscript board and interaction tool)</li> <li>▪ <b>Aesthetics</b> (Website main colour, retail store main colour, photo total view, photo enlargement, presentation tool, used photo, screen presentation (first screen) and screen presentation (second screen))</li> <li>▪ <b>Fitness</b> (Bulletin board position, purchase postscript board position, image position, image number and searching bar position)</li> </ul>
Young Ha, Wi-Suk Kwon and Sharron J. Lennon	2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Online path finding assistance</b> (Sitemap, search engine and merchandise categorisation)</li> <li>▪ <b>Environment</b> (Atmospheric features, sale/promotion signage and colour)</li> <li>▪ <b>Manner of product presentation</b> (Types of product view, product view presentation methods, detailed reviews, swatch, colour presentation, product display method and mix-and-match)</li> </ul>
Xiaofen Ji and Chen Pang	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Manner of presentation</b> (Methods of presentation, location of an image, and the number of pictorial images)</li> <li>▪ <b>Presentation technique</b> (Presentation format of the product and availability of picture enlargement)</li> <li>▪ <b>Product components</b> (Images available for colour description, size options, availability coordination, and garment details)</li> </ul>
Lola Khakimdjanova and Jihye Park	2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Manner of presentation</b> (Human model, flat surface, hangers and mannequins)</li> <li>▪ <b>Presentation technique</b> (Format of product shown on screen, view of mannequin, view of human model and picture enlargement)</li> <li>▪ <b>Supplementary presentation</b> (Presentations with different colour options, size information, various body shapes, garment coordination and image focus views)</li> <li>▪ <b>Aesthetics of presentation</b> (Alternative backgrounds, alternative human model pose and alternative mannequin pose)</li> <li>▪ <b>Image structure and layout</b> (Location of image, total number of product images available in the initial screen, and total number of product images available per product)</li> </ul>



Hristo Katrandjiev and Ivo Velinov	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low task relevant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Registration</b> (Registration requirements)</li> <li>– <b>Atmospheric</b> (Background colour atmospheric features and text colour)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ High task relevant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>Web navigation</b> (Site map and search engine)</li> <li>– <b>Web graphics</b> (Website geometry and presentation format)</li> <li>– <b>Product demonstration</b> (Product view dimensionality, apparel colour, product display method and mix-and-match)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Wanmo Koo and Hyejune Park	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Visual cues</b> (Colours, image display and web design)</li> <li>▪ <b>Information cues</b> (product information: size, price and material, e-tailer information, and e-store events)</li> <li>▪ <b>Navigation cues</b> (Navigation bars, search options, logical menu and organisation of information)</li> <li>▪ <b>Social cues</b> (forums, blogs, communities and social media)</li> </ul>
Rimantas Gatautis and Egle Vaiciukynaite	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Virtual layout and design (Navigation design)</li> <li>▪ Virtual atmospherics (Information content and structure, colours, aesthetics design, website brand/personality and music)</li> <li>▪ Virtual theatrics (Image interactivity, and vividness and interactivity)</li> <li>▪ Virtual social presence (Communities, communication, recommendations and avatars)</li> </ul>
Jiajing Wu	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online product presentation (Product density, model appeal, image quality and interactivity of product presentation)</li> <li>▪ Website visual design (website's visual appeal)</li> <li>▪ Web advertising (Website's advertising)</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own compilation

From Table 3.1, it is evident that there are many overlapping themes between the various authors regarding the number of online visual merchandising themes. However, the naming of the online visual merchandising themes differs throughout, for example, online path finding versus virtual layout, and design versus web navigation. One reason for this might be that no clear framework related to the online visual merchandising themes has been developed as yet. The purpose of this study is therefore, to develop a conceptual integrated framework of online visual merchandising themes for apparel e-tailers to use when developing an e-store.

The following sub-section focuses on the online visual merchandising themes that were identified from literature and summarised in Table 3.1 above. All the existing themes (51) that shared the same purpose and meaning were grouped together into 12 new themes and are individually discussed in more detail below.

### **3.6.1 Virtual layout and design**

This refers to the underlying e-store structure or layout, also known as navigational design, which refers to how the information is provided on the e-store. E-stores may contain navigation design options that include site maps, bars, individual hyperlinks, image maps, drop-down menus/collapsible menus and search options that add to the convenience of buying from e-stores.

The virtual layout and design influence the overall attractiveness of the e-store, including the e-store geometry, in other words, the orientation or position of major buttons and the overall functionality of the site (Gatautis & Vaiciukynaite, 2013:541; Kaikkonen, 2012:14; Koo & Park, 2017:39; Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014:87; Ha *et al.* 2007:484; Park *et al.*, 2009:920 & 925; Ha & Stoel, 2011:205; Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:8).

### **3.6.2 Website content**

This refers to the amount and quality of information that is provided on the e-store. For example: Is all the necessary information about the e-store complete and available? Will shoppers find the site easy and quick to work with? (Ha & Stoel, 2011:205; Chang & Chen, 2008:819).

### **3.6.3 Website navigation**

This refers to the availability of a search engine tool within the e-store, to enable shoppers to search for a specific item rather than to follow menu options. However, logical menu options are also important to have, for example, having a male option and a female option with all the related merchandise below each main option on the menu.

Website navigation also includes merchandise categorisation, which refers to how the merchandise is classified, and the convenience with which the merchandise categories are presented, for example women->clothing->dresses. Sitemaps can also give the shopper a holistic view of what the e-store has to offer. Website navigation is a critical aspect for the success of an e-tailer's e-store, as the main purpose is to keep

consumers on the e-store to make a purchase (Gatautis & Vaiciukynaite, 2013:541; Koo & Park, 2017:39; Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014:87; Ha *et al.* 2007:484; Park *et al.*, 2009:920 & 925; Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:8).

#### **3.6.4 Virtual atmospherics**

This refers to *background colour*, which is regarded as the predominant colour used in the background, also having the most screen area. *Colour scheme* refers to the arrangement or patterns of colours to form an integrated whole. *Percentage of white space*, also called negative space, which is the open spaces found between other design elements or objects. *Background music* can either be content or atmospheric sound, where content sound refers to a sound clip to give consumers a 'preview' before buying and atmospheric sound referring to music playing in the background while browsing the website. Lastly, *fonts* is referred to the type of text used on the website (Gatautis & Vaiciukynaite, 2013:539; Kaikkonen, 2012:15; Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014:87; Ha *et al.* 2007:485; Park *et al.*, 2009:924; Ha & Stoel, 2011:205; Kim & Lennon, 2009:414; Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:8).

#### **3.6.5 Product presentation/technique**

This refers to effective ways of arranging sensory or aesthetic information to assist consumers in making purchasing decisions. Due to the fact that consumers cannot touch or try on merchandise items when shopping online, product presentation can play an important role in the consumer's decision to make an online purchase or not.

Product presentation includes the different colour options or colour samples, the availability of various body shapes that shoppers can choose from to create a visual picture of how the item can look, and the option of garment coordination where shoppers can mix-and-match different merchandise items on one model.

Product density refers to the density (crowdedness) of pictures and texts on an e-store and the space arrangement on the page. E-stores that have good image arrangements and text density are more successful.

Models, also known as mannequins, refer to human bodies showing off apparel items to help consumers to see the merchandise items better and to increase the consumers' visualisation and imagination abilities.

Manner of presentation refers to the merchandise being presented either on models, flat surfaces or on hangers, as well as front, side or back views. The methods or formats used to present or display the merchandise can be either two-dimensional (2D) or three-dimensional (3D) images that can be rotated by one or multiple clicks. 3D presentations have the ability to show merchandise images from various angles, to get a more detailed view that can also enlarge the images. High image quality and interactivity of product presentation helps to give more detail of the products. Larger pictures from more angles can draw more attention and assist consumers with better visualisation and imagination, as well as increase mental intangibility. (Khakimdjanova & Park, 2005:313; Ji & Pang, 2006:308; Ha *et al.* 2007:486; Kim & Lennon, 2009:414; Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:8; Wu, 2014: 25).

### **3.6.6 Product information**

This refers to all the information that is provided to consumers on an e-store. For example, product information on the sizes, prices, materials and textiles used, care instructions, product demonstrations, availability of stock and colour descriptions. This includes information about the organisation or e-tailer, such as their story or history, information about upcoming events, such as a sale, and information about the place of manufacturing, such as made in South Africa.

These are all important factors that e-tailers should incorporate on their e-store (Koo & Park, 2017:39; Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014:90; Ji & Pang, 2006:308; Park *et al.*, 2009:920; Ha & Stoel, 2011:205).

### **3.6.7 Virtual theatrics**

This includes animation techniques, and the vividness and interactivity of the images. Image interactivity refers to pictures that can be opened to show an enlarged product image when clicked on, as well as virtual models trying on various merchandise items. Vividness and interactivity refer to media richness (colourfulness), how products are presented, for example 3D views, images that can rotate, and so on (Gatautis & Vaiciukynaite, 2013:540; Kaikkonen, 2012:15; Ha *et al.* 2007:486; Park *et al.*, 2009:923).

### **3.6.8 Virtual social presence**

This refers to the implementation of social evidence, which ensures consumers that other consumers do buy from this e-store. This refers to themes such as virtual community, avatars, recommendations and communication.

Active online communities improve consumers' emotions. Communication refers to an e-store that enables the consumers or website visitors to chat with the e-tailer, and even to share information and images onto social media platforms, for example Facebook.

The recommendation systems help to identify customer requirements, assists in anticipating customer requirements, and is an aid to satisfy customer requirements (Gatautis & Vaiciukynaite, 2013:541; Kaikkonen, 2012:15; Koo & Park, 2017:39; Park *et al.*, 2009:923).

### **3.6.9 Customer service**

This refers to various aspects, such as the responsiveness and willingness of the e-store to attend to customer queries within a reasonable timeframe. This also includes the availability of information regarding certain aspects such as the return policy, shipping information and costs, additional services that the e-tailer provides, sales, and the need for registration.

Website registration refers to the requirement that consumers need to provide their personal information to be able to buy from the specific e-store (Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014:87,90; Wu, 2014: 25; Koo & Park, 2017:39; Chang & Chen, 2008:819; Ha & Stoel, 2011:205; Park *et al.*, 2009:923).

### **3.6.10 Security**

This refers to the ability to trust the e-store, the ability of the e-store to guarantee safe transactions, and the assurance to consumers that their privacy and personal information is protected (Ha & Stoel, 2011:205; Chang & Chen, 2008:819). However, security in general is an important aspect that has been identified by Ha and Stoel (2011:209) for e-stores, and very little research has been done on these aspects. Further investigation into the privacy and security of e-stores is needed.

### **3.6.11 Web advertising**

This refers to e-store (website) advertisements such as banner ads and text that shows promotional messages, for example, free delivery, discounts and coupons that can draw more consumers onto the e-store and increase the e-tailers competitiveness (Wu, 2014: 28; Ha *et al.*, 2007:485; Park *et al.*, 2009:923).

### **3.6.12 Website brand**

This refers to the image of the e-tailer or brand in the eyes of the consumer, while personality refers to the mental presentation of the e-store. The e-store or brand should ensure trust for the shopper and reduce the perceived risk (Gatautis & Vaiciukynaite, 2013:541; Chang & Chen, 2008:819).

More research is needed on the various online visual merchandising themes, as discussed above, to provide e-tailers with a structured framework containing all the relevant online visual merchandising themes that are needed in the development of an effective and successful e-store that will enhance online sales.

Wu (2014:2) indicated that convenience is the number one factor that attracts consumer to an e-store, and that positively influences consumers to shop at e-stores. Therefore, the more efficient an e-tailer's e-store, the higher the likelihood that consumers will stay on the e-store, and ultimately make purchases. Hence, the design of an e-tailer's e-store is critical and it can influence the consumer's attitude towards an e-store. The section below will focus on the design of an effective e-store.

## **3.7 E-STORE DESIGN**

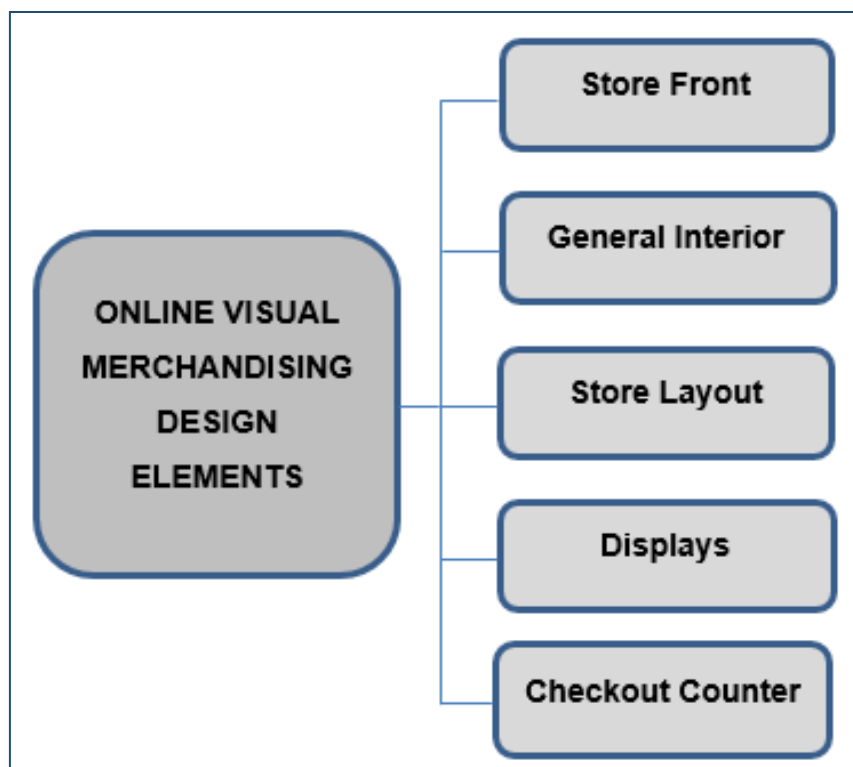
Previous research has shown that the e-store design can influence consumers' behaviour and attitudes towards the e-store, as well as their willingness to shop at the e-store (Ha *et al.* 2007:478). Therefore, the design of an e-store is crucial, as it will determine the level of satisfaction that consumers have of the e-store experience. If consumers have a good experience they will be more inclined to return, while if they did not have a good experience, they are less likely to return to the e-store (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012:398).

A good consumer e-store experience is determined by various online visual merchandising themes, such as how easy it is to find information, the structure of the

e-store, the menu choices, ease of navigation, download speed, the searching options, as well as by the intangible themes, such as the graphical design and layout of the e-store.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012:398-401), Berman and Evans (2013:501-503) and Poloian (2013:198-199), there are a few online visual merchandising design themes that e-tailers need to take into consideration when designing an e-store, to ensure that the e-store provides the same experience as a brick-and-mortar store. Although various visual merchandising elements apply to both brick-and-mortar stores and e-stores (Section 3.4), there are some differences.

Based on the existing literature of Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012:398-401), Berman and Evans (2013:501-503) and Poloian (2013:198-199), the online visual merchandising design elements, as indicated in Figure 3.3 below, namely, storefront, general interior, store layout, displays and checkout counters are elements that need to be focused on when designing an effective e-store.



**Figure 3.3: Online visual merchandising design elements**

Source: Adapted from Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2012:398-401); Berman & Evans (2013:501-503); Poloian (2013:198-199)

The visual merchandising design elements as depicted in Figure 3.3 are discussed in more detail below.

### **3.7.1 Storefront**

Storefront, as a design element of online visual merchandising, refers to the front page or home page of the e-tailer's e-store, and should comprise and focus on the following (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012:398-401; Berman & Evans, 2013:501-503; Poloian, 2013:198-199):

- Show and indicate the name and setting of the e-tailer.
- Be inviting, draw consumers to the e-store and encourage the consumers to enter the e-store.
- Make it easy for consumers to go into the e-store.
- Display all merchandise lines and categories.
- Graphics should be used as display windows and images as access points.
- The e-store should have a unique look and feel.
- The e-tailer's e-mail address, mailing address and phone number should be given.
- Inform consumers that the e-tailer is involved with social media, by for instance showing the icons.
- Be listed at various search engines, such as google, yahoo, Bing, and so forth.

To have an effective storefront (homepage) is critical, as it is the first screen that appears to consumers when entering an e-store and is therefore regarded as the store window of a brick-and-mortar store.

### **3.7.2 General interior**

General interior, as a design element of online visual merchandising, should set the 'shopping mood' in the same way that brick-and-mortar stores do. General interior refers to all themes and categories that are observed 'inside' an e-store and that affect a consumer's perception, for instance, the types of colours used, pictures, fixtures and fittings (Berman & Evans, 2013:493).

Various colour ranges, such as white to black, green to blue, red to yellow, and so on, can be used for backgrounds. Some e-tailers make use of audio or video clips about the merchandise on offer, to create interest among consumers on the e-store.



'Fixtures' in terms of e-stores refers to how simplistic or decorative the e-store look, whereas 'width of aisles' refers to how crowded the e-store appears by taking images and sizes of the text into account.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012:398-401), Berman and Evans (2013:501-503) and Poloian (2013:198-199), the general interior of an e-store consists, amongst others, of the following themes and categories that are of importance to the e-shopper:

- Instructions about how to use the e-store.
- Information and history about the e-tailer.
- Merchandise images and descriptions.
- The shopping cart and an explanation of how to place orders.
- A search function/engine that enables the consumer to search for specific merchandise items.
- If it is a multi-channel retailer or a click-and-brick, then the location of the physical store(s) should be included.
- If the e-tailer operates a loyalty programme, then the consumers need to log in to enable the e-tailer to track the consumers.

### **3.7.3 Store layout**

Store layout, as a design element of online visual merchandising, has two components which refer to the layout of each individual e-store page and the 'link' to move from page to page (navigation). It is critical for e-tailers to carefully plan the traffic flow of the e-store, as consumers do not want to struggle while shopping, and do not want to deal with any obstacles or inefficient layouts. Therefore, e-stores need to have a well-planned site map (Berman & Evans, 2013:502).

E-tailers will generally have a store-directory on the home page of the e-store that shows the various merchandise lines and then the categories from drop-down menus, which should be logical, functional and appropriate to the content. Consumers can also click on an image to enter the category of interest, for example women->shoes->brand->style.

### 3.7.3.1 Search function

Most e-tailers also have a search function on the e-store that enables consumers to shop for any merchandise item from anywhere on the e-store page, for instance, a consumer types in the merchandise name or category and is automatically directed to the relevant e-store page containing that merchandise item.

According to Indium Online (2009:1), there are six types of search functions that e-tailers can use in their e-store. It is advisable for e-tailers to provide more than one option to search for merchandise, as consumers prefer to choose how they want to search for and view merchandise, and what works for one consumer, might not work for another (Indium Online, 2009:1).

The six types of search functions that consumers can use include the following:

- Search by **product type**. This is the most well-known and easiest way of searching for merchandise, for example, shoes, jackets, pants.
- Search by **brand**, is an effective search option if e-tailers sell various branded merchandise, for example, Levis, Mango, Forever New, Guess.
- Search by **occasion**. E-tailers provide the option to search for specific occasions, for example, eveningwear, sportswear, swimwear.
- Search by **colour**, is an effective way to search for a specific colour item, for example, black pants, red dresses, gold handbags.
- Search by the **best deals**. Various consumers purchase merchandise in a certain price range, therefore give them the option of searching within a certain price range or by available deals, for example, pants between R100-R300, or sale items.
- Search by **best-seller** enables consumers to search for the best-selling items that might help them to find merchandise items that meet their needs the best.

As with brick-and-mortar stores, e-tailers also allocate more 'display' space to popular or new merchandise items and/or brands, and give them a better position, for example best-seller items will usually appear at the top of the page.

### **3.7.4 Displays**

Displays, as a design element of online visual merchandising, enable e-stores to display either an entire merchandise collection, or consumers can choose from tailored assortments. The choice of display has an influence on the appearance of the e-store pages that can either appear to be more crowded or less crowded. It also has an influence on the level of available merchandise choices and also on whether consumers will be confused with the display or not.

E-tailers can easily display merchandise items together on the e-store to create a 'complete look', and it also gives consumers the option to interactively mix-and-match merchandise to create a specific outfit. E-tailers can also implement various graphics and images to create 'on sale' or promotional bins.

### **3.7.5 Checkout counter**

Checkout counter, as a design element of online visual merchandising, can be complex, due to the fact that consumers are more concerned about the security and privacy aspects of online purchases, as opposed to buying from a brick-and-mortar store.

It is evident that online consumers need to go through various online processes to complete an online transaction. Consumers must, in some cases, enter the model/item number and quantity, together with personal information such as the delivery address, e-mail address, delivery type, telephone number and credit card number. In their efforts to build a consumer database, some e-tailers also ask consumers to give their job title, company name and work address. In some instances, delivery and handling costs that are added to the transaction total may cause consumers, who were not aware of these fees, to cancel the transaction. Therefore, e-tailers should indicate from the start if delivery costs are free or not. Most e-tailers have also started to add more secure payment options, such as PayPal, PayGate and PayFast, which encrypt (convert data or information into a code to prevent unauthorised access (Rouse, 2017) personal information such as credit card details, therefore reducing the risk of fraud.

Based on the above discussion, it can be inferred that e-tailers need to carefully consider the design elements of storefront, general interior, store layout, displays and checkout counter, as these elements can have a direct effect on the success and functionality of an e-store.

### **3.8 SUMMARY**

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the online visual merchandising themes derived from the literature. The chapter commenced with a high-level discussion of the traditional brick-and-mortar visual merchandising, as well as the traditional brick-and-mortar visual merchandising themes. It was established by various researchers that although the concept of visual merchandising for both brick-and-mortar stores and e-tail stores are different, they do share the same goal of drawing consumers into the store/e-store and influencing them to make a purchase (Wu, 2014:13, 139; Ha *et al.*, 2007:479; Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:6).

This was followed by a discussion of online visual merchandising that looked into the similarities that exist between visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores and e-stores. The challenges that are experienced with online visual merchandising were then discussed, and it was evident that the main challenge was the fact that no tangible aspects of apparel merchandise can be experienced as in the case with brick-and-mortar stores. After an evaluation of the existing literature, the existing online visual merchandising themes were summarised into a table. Although various online visual merchandising themes have been identified, no clear framework exists as yet, and therefore there is a need to create a clear framework on the online visual merchandising themes that will enable e-tailers to develop efficient and successful e-stores. The chapter concluded with a discussion of e-store design and five design elements were identified that e-tailers need to take into consideration when planning the design of an effective e-store.

The following chapter will focus on the research methodology that lay the theoretical foundation for the empirical research that was undertaken.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

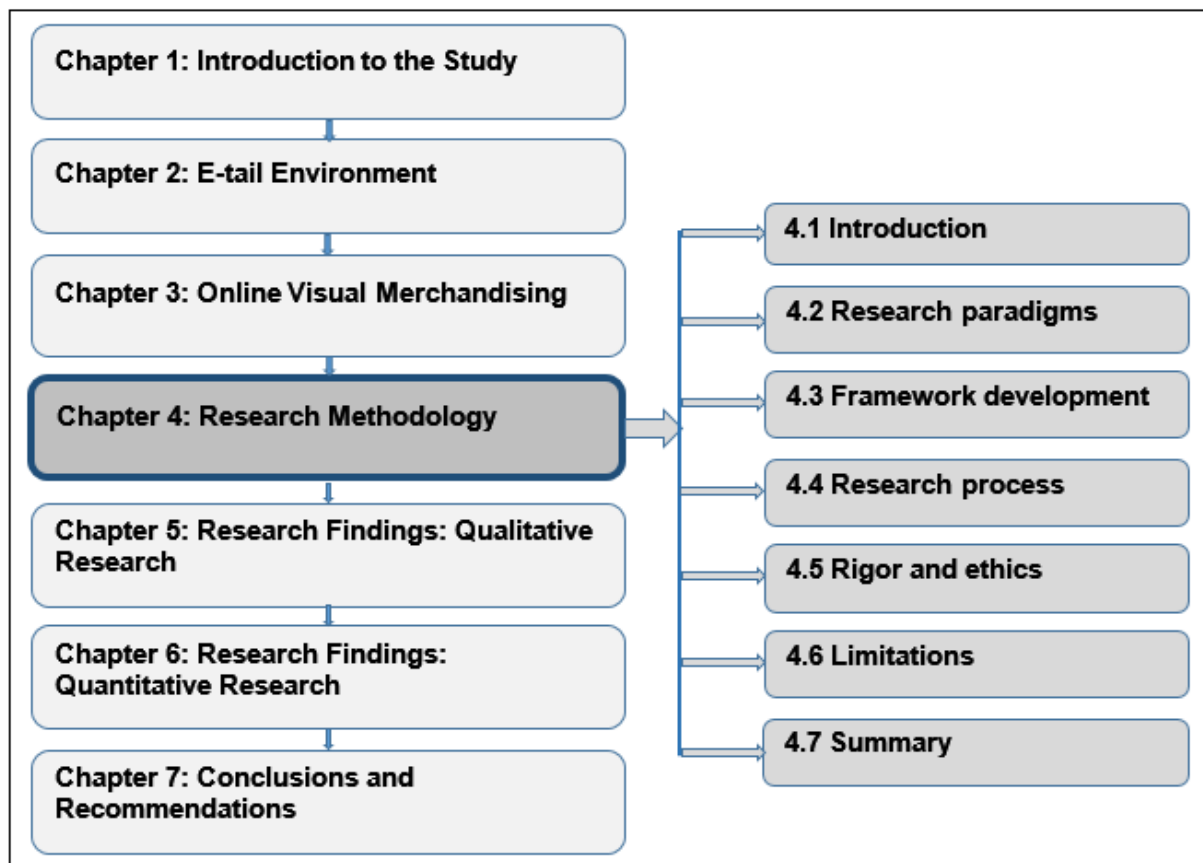
### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The first three chapters of the study provided a detailed literature overview of the topic of this study, namely, “developing a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers, from a South African consumers’ perspective”. The study commenced with Chapter 1, which aimed to provide the reader with a clear understanding about the topic under investigation. Chapter 2 provided a detailed discussion of the e-tail environment. The last literature chapter, Chapter 3, focused on the online visual merchandising themes. The current chapter, Chapter 4 focuses on the research process that was followed to achieve the purpose of the current study.

Research is defined as the study of a specific topic with the aim of gaining new knowledge about the topic (Oxford Dictionaries online, 2012; Nell, 2013:65). According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006:2), research is a systematic investigation or review where data is gathered, analysed and interpreted in some way to “... understand, describe, predict or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower individuals in such contexts” (Mertens, 2005). Research is usually conducted in a structured, systematic way, better known as the research process, to ensure the quality and validity of the data that was gathered (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:5; Nell, 2013:65).

This chapter commences with a short introduction to the research paradigm of the empirical study, followed by a discussion of the process of framework development. Thereafter, the research process followed in this study is discussed, including the research designs implemented for each empirical section (Part 1: qualitative research and Part 2: quantitative research). The remaining part of the chapter focuses on each empirical section of the study, where an in-depth discussion of the data-collection instruments, sample methods and analysis techniques are given. The chapter will end with a discussion of rigour and ethics and the limitations of the study.

Figure 4.1 depicts the overall layout of the study, including where Chapter 4 fits in and the expected layout of Chapter 4.



**Figure 4.1: Structure of Chapter 4**

Source: Author's own compilation

As depicted in Figure 4.1 the section that follows deals with the research paradigm employed in the current study.

## 4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

The term 'paradigms', also referred to as worldviews, epistemologies and ontologies, or research methodologies (Creswell, 2014:6) is defined as "... a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research", or the philosophical intent or motivation for undertaking a study (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006:2). According to Creswell (2014:6), the term paradigm means "... a basic set of beliefs that guide actions".

MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2010) and Creswell (2014:6) indicated that a paradigm includes three elements, namely, the belief about the nature of knowledge, the methodology and the criteria for validity. According to Trafford and Leshem (2008:84), paradigms indicate how the world is observed through perceptions, understandings and interpretations. Trafford and Leshem (2012:84) further argue that

a 'paradigm shift' explains the changes in terms of how something is perceived, it influences the observer, whether it is sudden or developing, therefore a paradigm shift moves an individual away from one way of seeing the world to another. A paradigm is therefore a way to show possible patterns and relationships which either develop or define boundaries.

For the purpose of this study, a pragmatic paradigm was followed. This pragmatic paradigm, according to Creswell (2014:10), and Creswell and Creswell (2018:10), arises out of actions, situations and consequences, instead of pre-established conditions and focuses on the 'what' and 'how' of the research problem (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006:3). Creswell (2014:10) further mentioned that instead of focusing on methods, researchers should rather focus on the research problem and use all the available designs to understand the problem. Therefore, the pragmatic paradigm is regarded as the paradigm that provides the underlying philosophical framework for mixed-methods research, where mixed-method research refers to the integration of both qualitative and quantitative research strategies (Creswell, 2014:10; Creswell & Clark, 2011:2; Feilzer, 2010:7), that can include both philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2014:4; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtli, 2010:16).

According to Creswell (2014:4), the main assumption of mixed-methods research is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative designs provides a more complete understanding of the research problem than any of the two designs on their own (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:10). Therefore, with the pragmatic paradigm, the 'research problem' is placed at the centre, and all the approaches are applied to understand the problem (Lodico *et al.*, 2010:16). With the research question at the centre, data collection and analysis methods are chosen that are most likely to provide insight into the question with no philosophical loyalty to any alternative paradigms (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006:3).

Due to the pragmatic mixed-method nature of the study, as indicated above, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to address the research objectives of the study to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework containing online visual merchandising themes that could be implemented by apparel e-tailers to stimulate sales.

The next section focuses on framework development, as the main purpose of the study is to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework.

### 4.3 FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The study at hand is titled “Developing a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers: A South African consumer perspective”. A key element in this title is the word ‘framework’, therefore before discussing the research process, it is important to establish what a framework is and to distinguish it from interrelated theories and models.

According to Ilott, Gerrish, Laker and Bray (2013) the purpose of theories, models and frameworks is to describe, explain or to predict concepts, which are names or labels for ideas and variables that characterise the phenomena under investigation. Furthermore, it describes propositions, which are referred to as statements that frame the problem and spell out the relationship between concepts.

**Theories** tend to be specific, with concepts which are changeable to hypothesis testing, for example, the theory of planned behaviour (Ilott *et al.*, 2013).

**Models** tend to be more rigid and strict, specific, and with a narrow scope, for example, the model of consumer decision-making which has three main components, namely inputs (including purchase situation, consumer characteristics and information sources), processes (including need arousal, information utility, criteria development and evaluation of alternatives) and outcomes (including decision, the purchase itself and post-decision evaluation) (Milner & Rosenstreich, 2013:107).

**Conceptual frameworks** are descriptive, showing relevant concepts and how they relate to each other (Ilott *et al.*, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, a conceptual framework was developed based on the empirical findings, which showed the most important online visual merchandising themes based on consumers’ perspectives and how they relate to consumers’ online purchasing behaviour.

The conceptual framework for a research study refers to the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform the research, which all form part of the design (Sage Publication, n.d.:39). A conceptual framework



is therefore defined as a visual or written 'product' that explains either in a graphical or storyline form, the main aspects, concepts, elements, variables or key factors that need to be studied, as well as the apparent relationships among them (Sage Publication, n.d.: 39).

According to Janse van Rensburg, Poggenpoel and Myburg (2015), a conceptual framework serves as a frame of reference for the specific topic under investigation. For the purpose of this study, the conceptual framework could serve as a frame of reference to assist brick-and-mortar stores to develop an e-store if they want to, and could also aid existing e-tailers to potentially improve their existing e-stores.

The conceptual framework for this study was developed based on the steps as proposed by Janse van Rensburg *et al.* (2015) which include a concept analysis that involves the empirical study of data collection, sampling, data analysis and the tests for trustworthiness, the placing of the concepts in context, and a description of the conceptual framework in terms of the overview, the structural description and process of the conceptual framework. The developed conceptual framework will be illustrated and explained in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the study.

Before developing the conceptual framework, the research process needed to be discussed and planned in detail, to ensure that the empirical sections (Part 1: qualitative and Part 2: quantitative) of the study were executed correctly. As indicated in Figure 4.1, the next section discusses the research process as it was applied to the current study.

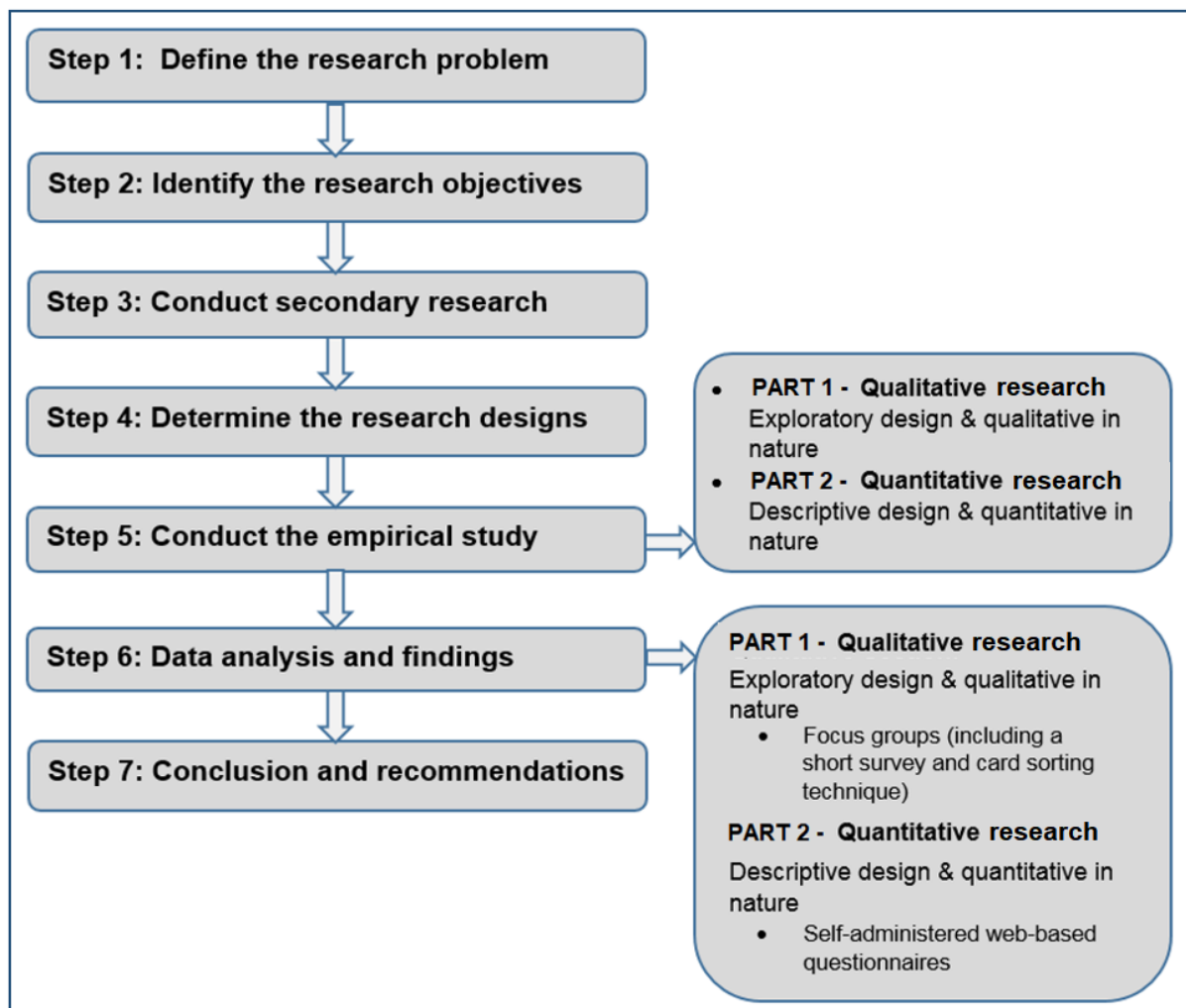
## **4.4 RESEARCH PROCESS**

Effective research requires that a process needs to be followed. The research process, as defined by Aaker, Kumar, Day and Leone (2011:47), provides researchers with a systematic, planned procedure towards the research project to ensure that all parts of the research project are consistent with each other (Nell, 2013:66). Malhotra (2010:41) defines the research process as a set of steps that explains the tasks to be accomplished in conducting a marketing research study. Similarly, Schindler (2019:27) defines the research process "... as a sequential process involving several clearly defined stages, namely, clarify the research question, design the research,

collect and prepare data, analyse and interpret data and report insights and recommendations”.

Babin and Zikmund (2016:61) however, indicated that the research process does not always follow a specific set of steps, as some of the steps can overlap each other during the investigation period (Nell, 2013:66).

Based on the analysis of the various research processes developed by a number of authors, the process, as shown in Figure 4.2, was followed in this study.



**Figure 4.2: Research process**

Source: Adapted from Brown *et al.* (2018:6); Babin & Zikmund (2016); Wiid & Diggines (2015); Clow & James (2014); McDaniel & Gates (2010); Malhotra (2010); Cant. (2010); Tustin, Ligthelm, Martins, & Van Wyk (2005)

Each step in the research process, as indicated in Figure 4.2 is discussed in detail in the sections below.

#### **4.4.1 STEP 1: Define the research problem**

The first step in the research process (as indicated in Figure 4.2) is the defining of the research problem or opportunity. According to Cooper and Schindler (2013:583), a research problem can be defined as the presentation of a specific problem to management, whereas a research opportunity refers to any favourable or untouched situation that can be utilised proactively by decision-makers to the advantage of the organisation (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:53; Nell, 2013:68).

The research problem or opportunity will indicate the type of information that is needed to address the specific problem or opportunity at hand, as well as how this information can be obtained in an effective and efficient way (McDaniel & Gates, 2010:46; Nell, 2013:68). Hence, a research problem that is clearly stated can be considered as the core to the research process (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:42).

The research problem associated with this study was discussed in Chapter 1, and the aim is to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers in South Africa. The existing literature on online visual merchandising mainly focuses on Korea, the US and China, therefore a gap regarding online visual merchandising in South Africa exists (Ha *et al.*, 2007:447; Katrandjiev & Velinov, 2014:84; Park *et al.*, 2009:916).

The gap further exists, as none of the research studies in the literature domain (refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.6, Table 3.1 for a summary of the studies on online visual merchandising) focused on an integrated online visual merchandising framework that e-tailers can use to develop e-stores (websites) that can most probably reduce the possible issues that are commonly associated with online purchases. Possible issues associated with purchasing online include, but are not limited to, consumers that do not trust the online payment system (Holmes, 2014:3), the lack of physical contact and touch with merchandise (Ha & Lennon, 2010:142), delivery and shipment problems in terms of damaged or lost merchandise, and high delivery fees. These issues all have an influence on the total online sales in South Africa.

Based on the research problem, a number of objectives were set which are discussed in the second step (Step 2) of the research process, as shown in Figure 4.2.

#### **4.4.2 STEP 2: Identify the research objectives**

The identification of research objectives is the second step in the research process, as shown in Figure 4.2. Research objectives are developed for a specific investigation and are regarded as the goals that need to be achieved at the end of the investigation (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:62). Research objectives are also usually referred to as the deliverables of a research project (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010:63). Objectives are usually stated in terms of specific information that is needed for researchers to address a specific research problem (Nell, 2013:69). Furthermore, McDaniel and Gates (2010:48) indicate that well-formulated objectives can be seen as an effective road map that the researcher can follow to achieve the research problem or opportunity at hand.

Berndt and Petzer (2011:29) indicated that the stated research objectives for an investigation can be broken down into two different categories: firstly, a primary objective which is the main thrust that the researcher wishes to achieve, and secondly, a few secondary research objectives that are directly linked to and derived from the primary objective. This statement is also confirmed by Wiid and Diggines (2015:58). For the purpose of this study, both primary and secondary objectives were formulated. The secondary objectives were developed from the primary objectives.

The primary research objective that is derived from the preliminary literature review is to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that can be used by apparel e-tailers in South Africa to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. From the primary research objective a number of secondary objectives can be formulated in order:

- to identify visual merchandising themes that need to be incorporated into an online visual merchandising framework from a consumer's perspective;
- to determine the factors that decrease the likelihood of consumers purchasing online;
- to determine the reasons why consumers are purchasing online;
- to develop an online visual merchandising framework containing concepts based on the identified online visual merchandising themes;

- to determine the relationships (propositions) among the conceptual framework constructs; and
- to identify areas for future research.

After setting the objectives, the next step in the research process, as indicated in Figure 4.2, refers to conducting secondary research (Step 3).

#### **4.4.3 STEP 3: Conduct secondary research**

Conducting secondary research, as depicted in Figure 4.2, is the third step of the research process. This study consisted firstly, of a theoretical literature study into the field of online visual merchandising, and secondly, an empirical study (in two parts) based on the objectives of the study. According to Wiid and Diggines (2015:70) researchers will usually begin by collecting secondary data related to the research, depending on the research objectives.

Tustin *et al.* (2005:120) described secondary research as research that already exists in the market place (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018:587), and to obtain secondary research data, researchers should follow a secondary research process called 'desk research'. For this study, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken as discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. According to Zikmund *et al.* (2010: 654), a literature review is defined as a direct investigation into published data that includes books and journals, and which discusses the relevant theory and presents empirical results that are relevant to a specific topic and can be used to explain and define a research problem (Schindler, 2019:583).

For the purpose of this study, secondary research was conducted to:

- provide background information and knowledge on the South African retail and e-tail industry, as well as on visual merchandising (see Chapter 1);
- provide a better understanding about the e-tailing environment in South Africa (see Chapter 2); and
- to identify existing online visual merchandising themes that e-tailers can implement in their current e-stores, as well as to enable brick-and-mortar stores to develop an e-store by incorporating these online visual merchandising themes (see Chapter 3).

In order to identify the existing online visual merchandising themes that were used as basis for the empirical study, a thorough literature review was conducted and the identified themes were discussed and summarised in detail in Chapter 3 (Section 3.6, Table 3.1).

The reason for a thorough literature review on the topic of online visual merchandising was to identify the existing online visual merchandising themes that had to be used in Part 1, the qualitative section of the study. An extensive content analysis was done, where all possible research studies on the topic in the literature domain were analysed, compared with each other, and then all duplicate themes were removed, to ensure that all the online visual merchandising themes were identified. Furthermore, the literature review also provided the researcher with more insight into and better knowledge and understanding of the field of online visual merchandising.

The researcher used the primary and secondary objectives of the study as the starting point when conducting the literature review to ensure that the online visual merchandising themes which were used as the basis in Part 1, the qualitative section of the study, were identified. Furthermore, the researcher conducted the literature review by making use of both internal and external secondary sources, such as various textbooks, journal articles (various research databases were consulted, including Google Scholar, Emerald, Elsevier, EBSCOhost and Science Direct), academic studies and internet searches, to name only a few.

According to Wiid and Diggins (2015:70), when secondary research does not address all the stated primary and secondary objectives, as is the case in this study, then primary data needs to be collected. The collection of primary data requires that the type of research design implemented in the study (Step 4) is firstly determined, which is discussed in the section below.

#### **4.4.4 STEP 4: Determine the research design**

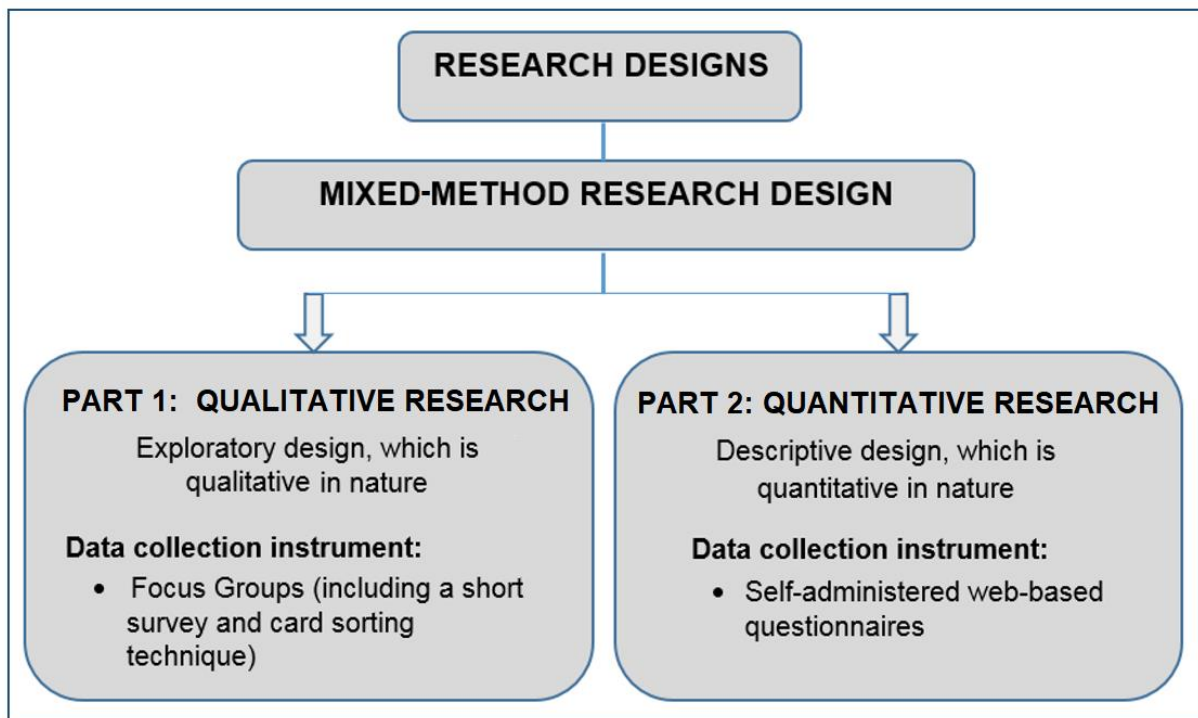
The fourth step of the research process (Figure 4.2) is to determine the research design. This step is necessary before collecting the primary data.

A research design, according to Schindler (2019:71), Malhotra (2010:102), Aaker *et al.* (2011:70), and Clow and James (2014:34), refers to the blueprint or framework of conducting a marketing research project that deals with all the processes that need to

be followed to obtain the specific information that will address the research problem or opportunity at hand.

Malhotra (2010:120) and Wiid and Diggins (2015:66-67) further indicated that there are two types of research designs that a researcher can follow, namely, an exploratory design or a conclusive design, which can be further broken down in a descriptive design and a causal design. For the purpose of this study, as indicated in Section 4.2, a pragmatic paradigm was implemented, which focuses on a mixed-method research design consisting of both an exploratory design which is qualitative in nature (Part 1, to be discussed in Section 4.4.4.1), and a descriptive research design, which is quantitative in nature (Part 2, to be discussed in Section 4.4.4.2).

Figure 4.3 illustrates the mixed-method research design that was used.



**Figure 4.3: Research designs for both qualitative and quantitative sections**

Source: Author's own compilation

The research designs for both Part 1 (qualitative research) and Part 2 (quantitative research) are discussed below.

#### **4.4.4.1 Part 1: Qualitative research**

As indicated in Figure 4.3, Part 1 of the study implemented an exploratory research design, which was qualitative in nature. An exploratory research design, as the name

suggests, wishes to explore new or unknown areas to gain insight and understanding into the new or unknown area (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:66; Malhotra, 2010:104). Therefore, an exploratory research design, according to Babin and Zikmund (2016:54), is used when ambiguous situations or ideas need to be explored and clarified to solve a particular problem or to potentially create business opportunities. Furthermore, McDaniel and Gates (2010:43) indicated that exploratory research is regarded as preliminary research, which helps researchers to understand a specific problem or opportunity (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:39, 47). Moreover, exploratory research is usually qualitative in nature, which enables researchers to uncover any underlying motivations or ideas that participants might have about the given topic (Schindler, 2019:76; Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2009:152-153; Nell, 2013:74). According to McDaniel and Gates (2010:44), exploratory research can be in the form of in-depth interviews, pilot studies, experience surveys, case analysis, projective techniques and focus groups.

Exploratory research was therefore deemed appropriate for the first part of this study, as the aim of the qualitative section was to obtain insight from South African online apparel consumers about the online visual merchandising themes that are needed to influence consumer purchasing behaviour, and reduce the identified concerns, as indicated in Chapter 1 and in Section 4.4.1. The researcher found that the existing literature lacks an effective integrated framework incorporating the online visual merchandising themes that could assist brick-and-mortar stores wishing to develop an e-store and that could also aid existing e-tailers to potentially improve their existing e-stores. Babin and Zikmund (2016:54) indicated that exploratory research is used to clarify unclear situations, and in this case, the online visual merchandising themes are unclear.

As depicted in Figure 4.3, the exploratory design in Part 1 of the study implemented a qualitative method which means that the research was gathered in such a way that it would provide insight and understanding about the problem at hand (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:4; Malhotra, 2010:171; Wiid & Diggines, 2015:65). The qualitative nature enabled the researcher to gather rich and detailed information (insight) from the focus groups (South African online apparel consumers) as well as from the short survey questionnaire and card sorting techniques about online visual merchandising themes. The qualitative findings obtained from the focus groups (including the short



survey and card sorting activity) were used in the development of the self-administered web-based questionnaire used in Part 2 (the quantitative section) of the study.

As shown in Figure 4.3, the qualitative methods used in Part 1 were primarily focus group interviews, accompanied by a short survey questionnaire and a card sorting technique among South African online apparel consumers. This is discussed in detail in Section 4.4.5.1.

#### **4.4.4.2 Part 2: Quantitative research**

As depicted in Figure 4.3, Part 2 of the study implemented a descriptive research design which was quantitative in nature. Descriptive research, as the name implies, is used to describe objects, people, groups or environments, and attempts to address the 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why' and 'how' questions (Schindler, 2019:75; Babin & Zikmund, 2016:54). Consumer attitudes, intentions, preferences, purchase behaviours, evaluation of current marketing mix strategies and demographics are all examples of descriptive information (Nell, 2013:75). A descriptive research design may provide information about competitors, target markets and environmental factors (Hair *et al.*, 2009:51). The research methods used in descriptive research are structured and quantitative in nature (Schindler, 2019:76). Typical approaches to a descriptive research design include personal interviews, surveys, email and web-based surveys and telephone interviews (Schindler, 2019:76; Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 86).

According to Malhotra (2010:106), descriptive research will generally assume that the researcher has existing knowledge about the problem at hand, as this knowledge about the causes of the problem had already been identified through exploratory research before conducting the descriptive survey.

Descriptive research was therefore deemed appropriate for Part 2 of the current study, as information regarding the perspectives of South African online apparel consumers about the online visual merchandising themes was gathered in Part 1 of the study which implemented an exploratory design. The information obtained in Part 1 was used together with the themes obtained from the literature study (Chapters 1, 2 and 3) to develop a self-administered web-based questionnaire that was used to collect data from South African apparel consumers.

As depicted in Figure 4.3, the descriptive design in Part 2 implemented a quantitative method which means that the research was gathered in such a way that it would

describe the problem at hand (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:54; Wiid & Diggines, 2015:67). The quantitative nature would enable the researcher to describe the collected data in terms of online visual merchandising themes obtained from South African apparel consumers.

As shown in Figure 4.3, Part 2 of the study consisted of a self-administered web-based questionnaires that was completed by South African apparel consumers. This is discussed in detail in Section 4.4.5.2.

The following section focuses on Step 5 of the research process, as depicted in Figure 4.2, which emphasises the empirical nature of the study.

#### **4.4.5 STEP 5: Conduct the empirical study**

As depicted in Figure 4.2, Step 5 of the research process consists of the empirical study. Both the qualitative (Part 1) and quantitative sections (Part 2) will be discussed in detail in terms of the overview of the section, the research instrument, the sampling process, the pre-testing of the instrument, the data-collection methods and data analysis.

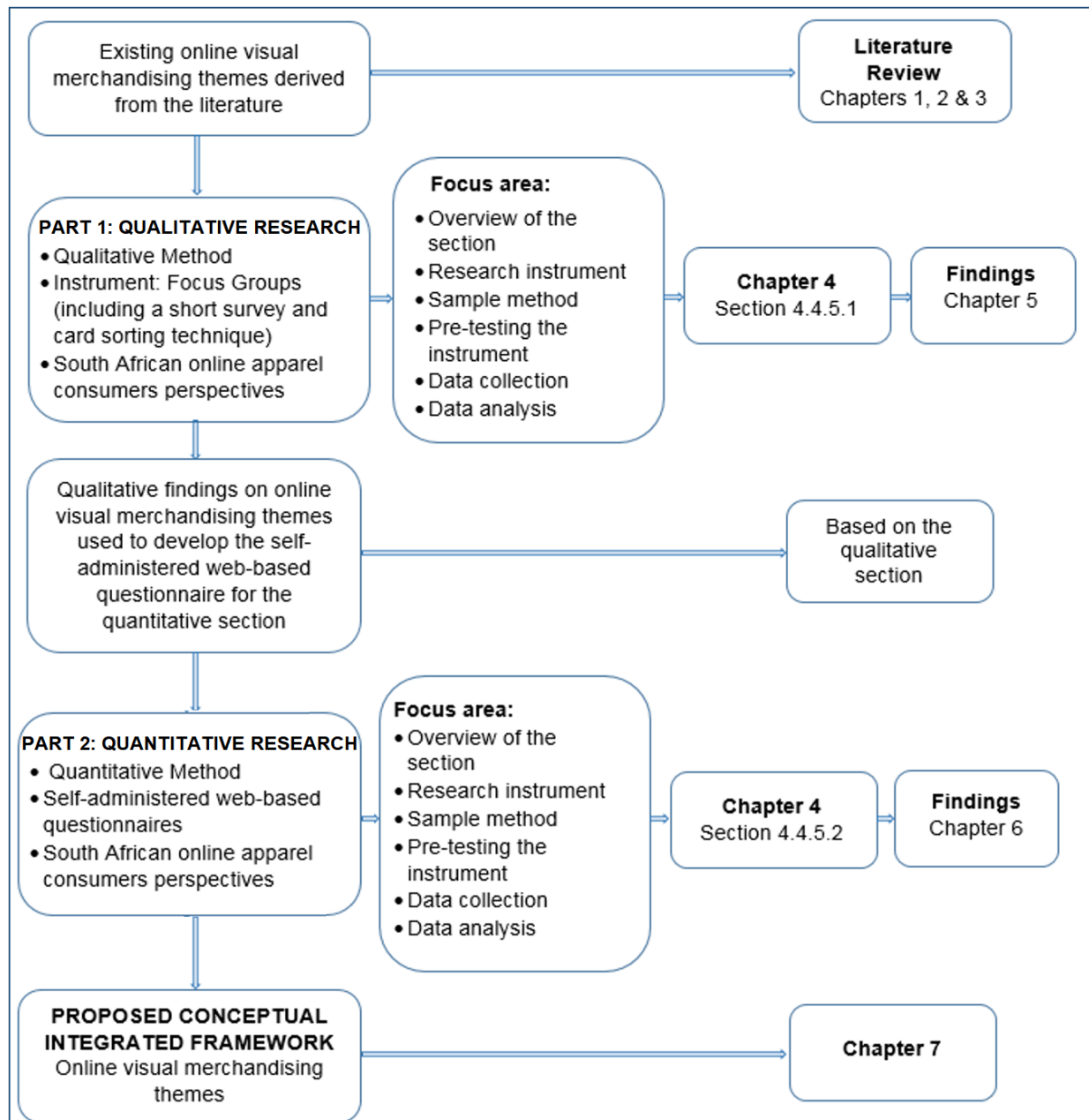
Primary data can be described as data that is being collected for the first time to solve a specific marketing problem or opportunity, thus to address the research problem or opportunity at hand (Schindler, 2019:586; Malhotra, 2010:73). According to Kapoor and Kulshrestha (2010:68), there are two ways in which primary data can be collected, firstly, through observational techniques, and secondly, through communicational techniques.

According to Wiid and Diggines (2015:136), observational techniques can be defined as “... the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of people, objects and occurrences without questioning or otherwise communicating with them” and it includes human or mechanical methods (Kapoor & Kulshrestha, 2010:70).

Whereas, communicational techniques can be defined as “... a method of primary data collection in which information is gathered by communicating with a representative sample of people” and it includes survey questionnaires, personal interviews, telephone surveys, written communication (mail) and web-based internet methods (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:116).

For the purpose of this research study, as indicated in Section 4.2, it was deemed necessary to implement a mixed-method research design by using both qualitative and quantitative data (see Section 4.4.4) to address the stated objectives as given in Chapter 1 and Section 4.4.2.

Figure 4.4 below, shows a visual breakdown of the mixed-method methodology that was implemented for this study.



**Figure 4.4: Breakdown of Step 5 - Empirical study**

Source: Author's own compilation

#### **4.4.5.1 Part 1: Qualitative research**

The empirical study started with focus group interviews, which included a short survey questionnaire and a card sorting technique, among South African online apparel consumers that have bought apparel-related products from an apparel e-store (website) in the past. The aim of the focus group interviews was to gain insight from the consumers in terms of the existing online visual merchandising themes used on apparel e-stores, as well as the identification of any other additional online visual merchandising themes that could lead to the stimulation of online apparel sales from the consumer's perspective. The aim of both the short survey questionnaire and card sorting technique was for confirmability of findings between the three data-collection techniques used in Part 1 of the study.

A detailed discussion of Part 1 (the qualitative research) of the empirical study follows below.

#### ***Overview of the qualitative research***

The research in Part 1 was qualitative in nature, which means that an unstructured, exploratory research design was employed, and this made use of a small sample to provide detailed insight and understanding of the particular problem at hand (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:219; Malhotra, 2010:73). A qualitative method is effective when it is important for the researcher to discover true feelings, perceptions, motivation, understanding and new insights without making use of statistical evidence (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:66).

The research instrument used to collect the data was primarily focus group interviews. In each focus group session, the participants were asked a few questions based on the objectives of the study and the existing online visual merchandising themes as derived from literature (Chapter 3, Section 3.6). After the focus group session, the participants were required to complete a short survey questionnaire, and sort 12 cards containing the main online visual merchandising themes according to importance.

The main purpose of the short survey questionnaire and card sorting technique was for confirmability of the findings between the three data-collection techniques. The information obtained from Part 1, the qualitative section, was used in the quantitative section.

### ***Research instrument for Part 1, qualitative research***

Focus group interviews refer to a formal process of bringing a small group of people, typically from six to ten participants, together for an interactive, spontaneous discussion on a specific topic (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:120; Hair *et al.*, 2009:161). The main feature of a focus group is that the interviewer tries to keep the discussion guided and focused on the topic of concern, and therefore tries to direct the group towards the focus of the research (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:120; McDaniel & Gates, 2010:94). Schindler (2019:139), and Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:201) indicated that focus groups fit well with an exploratory approach, due to the fact that it enables the researcher to shed light on unclear situations.

This meant that in terms of this study, the topic under investigation had to be discussed in detail, because different consumer views had to be explored and this would not have been possible with a structured questionnaire. The participants in the focus groups were asked about the online visual merchandising themes that an apparel e-store needs to have for them to purchase from that apparel e-store (see Appendix D and E for the semi-structured focus group questions). The ultimate aim of the study is to add more insight and information to the existing literature on online visual merchandising themes.

Focus group interviews were deemed to be an appropriate research instrument which would allow the study to gain more insight into the topic from the perspective of South African online apparel consumers, as focus groups enable consumers to discuss their true feelings, frustrations and concerns in their own words (Schindler, 2019:139; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010:141). Focus group interviews were also deemed appropriate due to the fact that it is relatively easy and fast to conduct the interviews which would benefit the study.

An additional reason for the choice of focus groups is because participants can 'piggyback' on each other's ideas, meaning that one participant can stimulate ideas and thoughts among the others, which can lead to creative thinking and discussion (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:122). Focus groups are also flexible which enables participants to provide more clear and detailed discussions on various aspects of the topic (Malhotra, 2010:181).

However, focus groups also have some disadvantages, which need to be considered by researchers. The typical disadvantages that could occur in this study are summarised in Table 4.1, together with possible solutions for each disadvantage.

**Table 4.1: Disadvantages of focus group interviews**

Disadvantage	Description	Solution
Inability to generalise results	Focus group interviews lack representativeness regarding the target population, and therefore it is difficult for researchers to generalise the results to the larger market.	The purpose of focus groups is to obtain new insight into the online visual merchandising themes. The information collected will be used in a self-administered web-based questionnaire which will be completed by a representative sample of the population.
Questions of data reliability	Small sample sizes prevent the researchers from analysing the data in terms of statistical formats.	The necessary steps to determine the trustworthiness of the data will be taken.
Subjectivity of interpretations	Given the subjective nature of the data collected, the researcher can misinterpret the data.	The necessary steps will be taken to analyse the data and ensure that the data is not misinterpreted.
High cost per participant	The cost of identifying, recruiting and compensating focus group participants, together with the cost of the interviewer and moderator, are overall quite high.	The researcher will keep the costs as low as possible.

Source: Adapted from Zikmund *et al.* (2010); Kapoor & Kulshrestha (2010); Hair *et al.* (2009); Nell (2013:82)

Together with the focus group interviews, the participants were also required to complete a short survey questionnaire and a card sorting activity to confirm confirmability between the findings obtained in the qualitative section. A questionnaire according to Clow and James (2014:323), is a set of questions used to produce data that will achieve the specific objectives of the research study (refer to Section 4.4.5.2 for a detailed discussion on questionnaire design). (Refer to Appendix F for the short survey questionnaire that participants were required to complete after the focus group session.)

Card sorting, as the name suggests, is a technique that requires participants to arrange information into logical groups (Experience UX, 2019). According to Roth,

Finch, Blanford, Klippel, Robinson and MacEachren (2006:1) "... card sorting requires that participants organise a set of items (i.e., cards) into categories according to some characteristic(s) of the cards (i.e., the sorting criterion)". Card sorting is a useful method used for delineating categories, themes or characteristics (Roth *et al.*, 2006:1).

The card sorting technique was therefore deemed appropriate for use in this study, as the researcher wanted to confirm again after the focus group session was held, which of the 12 online visual merchandising themes were the most important. The participants were required to sort/rank the 12 online visual merchandising themes in order of importance, where one is most important and 12 is least important. (Refer to Appendix G for the 12 cards used in the card sorting activity.)

### ***Sampling method for the qualitative research***

A series of steps need to be followed to determine the sampling method for qualitative research. The first step refers to the population of the study, the second step refers to the sample frame of the study, the third step refers to the sampling method of the study, and the fourth step refers to the sample size. Each step is discussed below.

The **target population** of interest, according to Malhotra (2010:372), refers to the collection of detailed information from specific elements, objects or a total group of people which will allow the researcher to make conclusions. In simpler terms, the population "... is the entire group of people about whom the researcher needs to obtain information" (Schindler, 2019:87; McDaniel & Gates, 2010:326). For the purpose of this study, the target population is described as all South African online apparel consumers that have purchased apparel-related items online from an apparel e-store in the past.

The **sample frame** can be described as a representation of the elements of the target population, and it includes a list of characteristics with which to identify the target population (Schindler, 2019:90; Malhotra, 2010:373). It is therefore defined as a list of individuals in the population that will be selected to participate in the study (Aaker *et al.*, 2011:338).

The sample frame, based on the target population, was selected based on the inclusion criteria of the study, namely, they must be South African male and female consumers who:

- have bought apparel-related items from an apparel e-store (website) before;
- are older than 18 years;
- can read, write and speak English;
- have the time and are willing to participate.

The selection of a **sampling method** depends on the stated objectives of the study, the available resources, funding and time, as well as the nature of the research problem (McDaniel & Gates, 2010:332). Sampling methods can be broken down into two main categories, namely, probability and non-probability sampling which further consists of a number of techniques (Clow & James, 2014:229-230; McDaniel & Gates, 2010:332; Iacobucci & Churchill, 2010:285).

Probability sampling, also referred to as random sampling, works in such a way that every element or individual in the population has a known and fair chance of being selected (Schindler, 2019:96; Tustin *et al.*, 2005:344). Probability samples are often referred to as sampling ratios that are equal to the number of items in a sample which is divided by the total number in the population (Nell, 2013:87). Making use of a probability sampling method enables researchers to generalise the findings to the total population, as well as allowing researchers to predict errors that can occur (Hair *et al.*, 2009:312; Kapoor & Kulshrestha, 2010:137; McDaniel & Gates, 2010:52).

With regards to non-probability sampling, the sample is selected in a non-random manner, meaning that every element or individual in the population does not have a known or fair chance of being selected, and that the sample relies on the judgement of the researcher (Schindler, 2019:96; Tustin *et al.*, 2005:344). Non-randomness refers to population elements or individuals that are being selected on the basis of convenience, as they are easy and/or inexpensive to reach (Nell, 2013:88). Furthermore, non-probability samples cannot be generalised to the total population and the degree of expected sample errors is difficult to determine (Hair *et al.*, 2009:312; Kapoor & Kulshrestha, 2010:142; McDaniel & Gates, 2010:52).

For the purpose of this study, a non-probability sampling method, implementing the technique of judgement, was used in the qualitative part of the study. Judgement sampling is a sampling technique where the sample is chosen based on the researcher's judgement about some relevant characteristics of the sample members



(Babin & Zikmund, 2016:349). The inclusion criteria and characteristics of the sample members based on the researcher's judgment were discussed in the above paragraph about the sample frame.

A **sample size** according to Malhotra (2010:374) is the number of elements that need to be included in a study to represent the entire population. To determine the correct sample size can be a complex process, as a too big sample can waste valuable time, money and resources, while a too small sample can lead to inaccurate results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:150; Kapoor & Kulshrestha, 2010:145). It is therefore crucial that researchers need to consider certain qualitative factors, such as the importance of the decision, the nature of the research, the number of variables, the nature of the analysis, the sample size used in similar studies, incidence rates, completion rates and resource constraints, when determining the sample size (Schindler, 2019:95; Malhotra, 2010:374).

The sample size consisted of four focus group sessions, each with six participants. If data saturation did not occur from the four focus group sessions, meaning that no new data was forthcoming (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namely, 2005:5), then a fifth and sixth focus group session would have been held, till a point of saturation did occur. However, after the fourth focus group session was conducted, a point of saturation was reached, as various common characteristics and findings were evident. Therefore, no further focus group session were deemed necessary. The same was evident in the short survey questionnaire and card sorting activity.

### ***Pre-testing the instrument for the qualitative research***

Before the actual data-collection process can begin, it is necessary that the open-ended questions should be pre-tested (Nell, 2013:94). According to Malhotra (2010:354), a pre-test can be defined as "... the testing of the questionnaire on a small sample of respondents for the purpose of improving the questionnaire by identifying and eliminating potential problems". Similarly, Schindler (2019:180) emphasises that pre-testing enables the researcher(s) to modify the measurement instrument before the final test, which gives the researcher(s) the best opportunity to ensure that the measurement instrument is error-free. By so doing, it is feasible for the researcher to evaluate the open-ended questions to ensure that all possible problems are eliminated.

For the purpose of this study, the questions that were asked in the focus group interviews were pre-tested among six participants that did not form part of the final sample. The pre-test was conducted to ensure that all possible errors that could potentially occur were minimised, for example, to ensure that the wording of the questions was clear and that no misunderstandings occurred; and that the participants would not find the questions as too difficult or offensive to respond to. After the pre-test was conducted, no significant problems were identified.

### ***Data collection of the qualitative research***

The data-collection method, as indicated above, consisted primarily of focus group interviews that were voice recorded and then transcribed. A short survey questionnaire and a card sorting activity took place after the focus group interview. Both the short survey questionnaire and card sorting technique were based on the focus group discussion, where participants were required to answer two open-ended questions regarding the most important online visual merchandising themes, and then to sort/rank 12 cards based on the online visual merchandising themes according to importance. The purpose of both the short survey questionnaire and the card sorting activity was for confirmability of findings.

Each participant was invited via an email invitation to the focus group session. The email contained the date, time and place where the focus group session would take place, together with an explanation of what the participant could expect in the focus group session and the purpose of the study. Once the participants had agreed to participate in the focus group session, the sample was finalised. All the participants were reminded about the focus group session a week before, via an email message.

Each focus group session was scheduled for two hours, to ensure that enough time was available and that enough insight could be gained from each session. A conference room was booked that allowed a relaxed and quiet atmosphere with no disturbances during each focus group session. The chairs were arranged in a circle to enable all the participants to see and hear each other and the moderator clearly.

At the beginning of each focus group session, the moderator explained how the focus group session would work, and that the focus group session consisted of three activities. The first and most important activity was the focus group discussion among the participants on the semi-structured focus group questions (see Appendix D and

E). The second activity involved the completion of a short survey questionnaire where participants had to complete two open-ended questions that focused on the most important online visual merchandising themes as discussed in the focus group session and eight closed-end demographics questions (see Appendix F). The third activity of the qualitative research section was card sorting, where the participants were required to sort/rank the 12 existing online visual merchandising themes according to importance, where 1 is most important and 12 is least important (see Appendix G).

After the activities were explained to the group, some general rules were also discussed that the participants had to obey in terms of the voice recordings (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010:146). It was asked that the participants give each other a chance to finish their discussion and that all participants needed to participate. If the moderator noticed that some participants were dominating the discussion, then the other members would be asked to also give their views on the topic. Together with the process and rules of each focus group session, the researcher also explained the purpose of the study to ensure that all participants had a good understanding of the topic and would be able to freely participate in the discussions.

Before the focus group discussion started, the moderator showed the participants an example of an apparel e-tailer's e-store on a projector, to refresh their memories about the steps taken to search for and ultimately make an online purchase. The same e-store was shown in all four the focus group sessions.

Before, during and after each focus group session, the researcher ensured that the voice recorder worked properly to prevent the loss of valuable information and insight gained in the session.

### ***Data analysis of the qualitative research***

The purpose of data analysis, according to Tustin *et al.* (2005:102), is to understand the collected data and to draw possible conclusions from this data. For the purpose of the qualitative research done in Part 1 of the study, the researcher made use of thematic analysis, due to the fact that the required data for this method was contextual in nature.

Thematic analysis can be described as a qualitative research process that involves intensive searching through data to identify any possible patterns that might occur more than once (Tesch, 1990:113; Nell, 2013:97). The exploratory influence of this

acknowledged technique can be enhanced when the analyst requires background information on the research topic, and can therefore not be influenced by unfairness (Nell, 2013:97). Conversely, it is recommended that the analyst should have a basic understanding about the research topic at hand before data analysis can start (Tesch, 1990:113).

The data analysis process commenced after each focus group's session was individually transcribed, as stated by Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013:401). The interviews were transcribed and then the transcriptions were read through a few times, to allow the researcher to obtain a clear and sound understanding (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013:401). The written answers to the two open-ended questions were also carefully read through by the researcher, as these would be analysed in the same way as the focus group transcriptions.

During the data analysis process, the independent coder and moderator read the notes from the focus group interviews to gain a better and clearer understanding of what was discussed (Nell, 2013:98). All the ideas that the coder and the moderator came up with were written down in the margins next to the notes. The independent coder and the moderator highlighted the most interesting data and continuously asked themselves the question 'what is this about?' to determine the underlying meaning. All the while, the independent coder and the moderator wrote down any thoughts that came to their minds in the margin next to the notes.

The ideas were transferred into relevant topics that reflected both the moderator and the coder's meaning. All the related topics were grouped together and then combined into columns that were grouped into either 'main topics', 'unique topics' or 'leftover topics' (Nell, 2013:98). This list was then evaluated against the original data, and topics were shortened by codes and written next to the most suitable segments of the text. The most expressive wording for the different topics was selected and then defined and grouped into categories and sub-categories.

After the independent coder and the moderator had coded, processed and analysed the data, an original data set was then given to another independent coder to ensure that the themes and categories were correct and relevant. Lastly, a consensus discussion session was held among the moderator and the two independent coders in order to confirm the findings. Controlled literature provided the structure and

benchmark for evaluating the results in terms of themes and categories related to this particular research study with that of other research findings (Nell, 2013:98).

The questions related to demographics in the short survey questionnaire were analysed by means of SPSS version 23. Basic descriptive and inferential tests were done on the data. The card sorting activity was analysed by counting the amount of times that the same theme was sorted at a specific number of importance (1 to 12). As previously mentioned, the purpose of both the short survey questionnaire and the card sorting activity was only to support and confirm the data obtained from the focus group discussion, and therefore a detailed discussion was not provided. During the focus group session, the moderator also asked the participants to indicate the importance of each theme.

The new themes and categories obtained from the transcriptions were then added to the existing list of online visual merchandising themes, which was then used in the second part of the study, namely, the quantitative section of the empirical study.

Based on the discussion above, Table 4.2 below provides a summary of the qualitative research process as conducted in Part 1 of the study.

**Table 4.2: Summary of the qualitative research process**

<b>Aspect/Method</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Research instrument used:</b>	Focus groups (including a short survey questionnaire and a card sorting activity).
<b>Population:</b>	All South African online apparel consumers that have purchased apparel-related items online from an apparel e-store in the past.
<b>Sample frame:</b>	<p>The inclusion criteria for the sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ South African male and female consumers that have bought apparel-related items from an apparel e-store (website) before;</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers that are older than 18 years;</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers that can read, write and speak English; and</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers who have the time and are willing to participate.</li> </ul>
<b>Sampling method:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Non-probability sampling method</li> <li>▪ Judgement sampling technique</li> </ul>
<b>Sample size:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Four focus group sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Six participants per session</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Data collection:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus groups interview with two additional activities after the focus group discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– short survey questionnaire where participants had to complete two open-ended questions based on the existing online visual merchandising themes and eight close-ended demographics questions</li> <li>– card sorting where participants had to sort/rank the existing online visual merchandising themes according to importance.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Voice recordings of each focus group session</li> <li>▪ Transcriptions of each of the focus group session recordings</li> </ul>
<b>Data analysis:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thematic analysis</li> <li>▪ SPSS version 23 (inferential and descriptive statistics of the demographics questions)</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own compilation

#### **4.4.5.2 Part 2: Quantitative research**

Part 2 of the study implemented a self-administered web-based questionnaire. The self-administered web-based questionnaire was conducted among South African apparel consumers that had purchased online apparel items in the past in an effort to test and describe the existing online visual merchandising themes derived from the literature, as well as the additional online visual merchandising themes derived from the qualitative research.

A detailed discussion of Part 2 (the quantitative research) of the empirical study follows below.

##### ***Overview of the quantitative research***

The research in Part 2 was quantitative in nature, which refers to a research method that makes use of a larger and more representative sample by addressing the research objectives through an experiential assessment that involves numerical measurements and analysis (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:112; Wiid & Diggines, 2015:95). Quantitative research tends to be more structured, which makes it easier to measure and analyse the responses. Due to the fact that quantitative research is more structured, a greater number of people can be included in the sample which contributes to the generalisation of results (Malhotra, 2010:171; Wiid & Diggines, 2015:95).

The research instrument that was used to collect the data was a self-administered web-based questionnaire. The self-administered web-based questionnaire was developed after the completion of the qualitative research so that the additional online visual merchandising themes that were identified by the South African online apparel consumers could be incorporated. The structured questions in the self-administered web-based questionnaire were based on the objectives of the study.

##### ***Research instrument for Part 2, the quantitative research***

As previously mentioned, the instrument used for the quantitative research was a self-administered web-based questionnaire. According to Clow and James (2014:323), a questionnaire is a set of questions that is used to produce data that will achieve specific objectives of the research study. In essence, the quality of the data obtained will depend on the quality of the questionnaire's design (Clow & James, 2014:323).

With regards to the design of the questionnaire, Clow and James (2014:323) mentioned that there is no perfect format for a questionnaire, however, the principles associated with questionnaire design can enhance the quality of a questionnaire, which in turn will increase the usefulness of the data generated.

With regards to a self-administered web-based questionnaire, the discussion in the previous paragraph has reference, meaning that a web-based questionnaire is similar to a paper-based questionnaire. The only difference is that respondents are required to complete the questionnaire, by themselves, over the Internet, with no face-to-face interaction, and the responses are immediately stored on a database (Clow & James, 2014:177; Wiid & Diggines, 2015:131). Babin and Zikmund (2016:187) defined a self-administered questionnaire as a questionnaire in which the respondent takes the responsibility for reading and answering the questions themselves, without the presence of the interviewer.

Babin and Zikmund (2016:193) indicated that there are three ways in which the self-administered web-based questionnaire can be sent to the potential respondents. Firstly, the web-based questionnaire can be included in the body of an e-mail, however, with this method there is a restriction on the length of the questionnaire. Secondly, the questionnaire can be included as an attachment to an e-mail. The potential respondent needs to open the attachment, complete the questionnaire, then save the completed questionnaire, reattach the questionnaire and send it back to the researcher by clicking on the reply button. The last and probably the best method is a hyperlink that is included in the body of an e-mail that will direct the respondent directly to the web-based questionnaire. The respondents then complete their responses directly on that website (Clow & James, 2014:177; Malhotra, 2010:219).

For the purpose of this empirical study, the last method mentioned above will be followed, whereby the potential respondents will receive an e-mail that includes a hyperlink to the web-based questionnaire.

A self-administered web-based questionnaire was deemed to be the appropriate instrument with which to obtain information based on the objectives of the study from the perspective of South African apparel consumers who have purchased apparel-related products from an e-store in the past.



The following are some of the reasons why a self-administered web-based questionnaire was appropriate for this study:

- More and more individuals are enjoying a high level of Internet accessibility around the world (Clow & James, 2014:177).
- The fast speed and low cost of using web-based questionnaires are a benefit, as thousands of emails containing the web-based questionnaire link can be sent to potential respondents instantaneously (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:131).
- This is a speedy process as the web-based questionnaire can be completed in only a few days or even hours.
- The results are ready in real time, therefore the researcher does not have to wait until all the questionnaires are received to tabulate the results (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:193).

Another benefit of using a web-based questionnaire is the fact that specialised software packages transform the responses immediately into spreadsheets and graphs that enable the researchers to examine the results at any time. These specialised software packages also minimise non-response items by 'forcing' respondents to answer each question before they can go to the next question (Clow & James, 2014:177).

The questions in the self-administered web-based questionnaire were in the format of structured questions, with structured responses, which means that the respondents needed to choose one out of a number of possible predetermined answers (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:169). The type of questions consisted of various comparative scale questions, where two or more objects needed to be compared, and various non-comparative scale questions, where only one object or standard was evaluated (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:156,159).

The self-administered web-based questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A focused on online apparel shopping and online visual merchandising themes, whereas Section B focused on the demographic profile of the respondents. Question two in Section A asked the respondents to indicate how many times they shop for apparel-related products online. If the answer to this question was 'never', then they were directed to skip question three and carry on with question four in Section A.

Section A contained multiple-choice, single- and multiple-response questions, and a five-point and three-point Likert scale question based on the online visual merchandising themes.

Section B contained questions based on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. (See Appendix I for the self-administered web-based questionnaire.)

### ***Sampling method for the quantitative research***

The same steps as indicated and discussed in Section 4.4.5.1 were followed to determine the sampling method for the quantitative research. For definitions and theoretical explanations, also refer to Section 4.4.5.1. Each step is discussed below.

The **target population** of interest are described as all South African apparel consumers that have purchased apparel-related items from an apparel e-store in the past, and that are listed on iFeedback's Interactive Direct permissioned database of a population of 350 000 members.

The **sample frame** for the quantitative research, based on the target population, consists of the following inclusion criteria:

- South African male and female consumers that have bought apparel-related items from an apparel e-store (website) before;
- male and female consumers that are older than 18 years;
- male and female consumers that can read, write and speak English;
- male and female consumers that have access to email and the Internet;
- male and female consumers who have the time and willingness to participate; and
- male and female consumers that are on the database of iFeedback.

The sample frame, based on the criteria stipulated above, refers to iFeedback's Interactive Direct permissioned database and consists of a variety of consumers (350 000) in terms of salary, age groups, race, gender and province.

Due to the fact that the database of iFeedback was used, not all South African consumers had a fair and equal chance of being selected to be part of the sample, and therefore a non-probability **sampling method**, making use of judgement sampling was used. (See Section 4.4.5.1 for a full theoretical discussion of non-probability

judgement sampling.) The inclusion criteria and characteristics of the sample members based on the researcher's judgment have been discussed above.

According to The Research Advisors (2006), there are many formulas that can be used to calculate the required **sample size**, based on whether the data collected is to be of a categorical or quantitative nature, for example, to estimate a proportion or a mean. These formulas require knowledge of the variance or proportion in the population, and a determination as to the maximum desirable error, as well as the acceptable Type 1 error risk, for example, the confidence level (The Research Advisors, 2006).

The Research Advisors (2006) constructed a table that statistically formulates the optimal sample size for any type of quantitative study, given the population size, a specific margin of error, and a desired confidence interval. The Research Advisors (2006) further indicated that researchers usually implement a sample size level of about 500 to optimally estimate a single population parameter that will be representative to the entire population.

For the purpose of this study, a sample size of 384, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, was deemed appropriate for a population of 350 000 (Raosoft, 2004). However, due to that fact that factor analysis would be used to analyse the data, a larger sample size was considered, and after the data-cleaning process, the sample size for the quantitative section consisted of 622 respondents.

The sample size for the quantitative section was considered as sufficient and statistically significant by Unisa's Bureau of Market Research (BMR).

### ***Pre-testing the instrument for the quantitative research***

As indicated in Section 4.4.5.1, the formal data-collection process can only commence after the instrument has been pre-tested. (Refer to Section 4.4.5.1 for a theoretical discussion of pre-testing.)

The self-administered web-based questionnaire was pre-tested among 65 South African apparel consumers that met the inclusion criteria, as stipulated above, however, the 65 respondents did not form part of the final sample of 622. According to Malhotra (2010:354), the sample size of a pre-test is usually between 15 and 30 respondents, depending on the heterogeneity of the population, which confirms that the sample of 65 for pretesting was sufficient.

The self-administered web-based questionnaire was emailed to all 65 respondents. Each respondent had to click on the hyperlink that directed them to the iFeedback online system. After the completion of each questionnaire, the data was automatically captured. The analysis process started where the 65 questionnaires were cleaned, edited, validated, and then only analysed by means of using SPSS version 23.

The findings of the pre-test indicated that no significant problems were identified and that the language, understanding and face validity of the instrument was therefore accepted.

### ***Data collection of the quantitative research***

As indicated above, iFeedback's Interactive database has 350 000 consumers (members). Between 2 000 and 5 000 consumers that fall within the stipulated inclusion criteria, were emailed at a time, requesting them to complete the self-administered web-based questionnaire. The email invitation that was sent to each potential participant provided the purpose of the study, the duration of the study and also indicated that participation was voluntary and anonymous. In the email a hyperlink was provided that redirected the participants directly to iFeedback's online system to complete the self-administered web-based questionnaire. It was also explained in the email that by clicking on the hyperlink "you agree and give your consent" to participate. The responses were captured automatically on iFeedback's online system when the respondents completed the self-administered web-based questionnaire.

The data-collection process was completed over four months (February to May 2019).

### ***Data analysis of the quantitative research***

The data obtained from the quantitative research was analysed by means of SPSS version 23. Before the analysis process started, the data was cleaned, edited and validated to ensure that no errors would occur during the analysis process (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:223).

Common factor analyses using the principal axis factoring method, as well as reliability analyses, were conducted on the data. Principal axis factoring with an oblique (Direct Oblimin) rotation was utilised. Factors were subsequently extracted using a combination of methods, including the Kaiser criterion or latent root criterion (eigenvalues-greater-than-one), scree-plot test, and the percentage of variance

criterion. The number of factors extracted was also considered in light of the *a priori* criterion, based on the extrapolated theoretical framework posited for the online visual merchandising themes underlying the self-administered web-based questionnaire. Following the factor analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for each of the various factors (sub-scales) were calculated.

Based on the discussion above, Table 4.3 below provides a summary of the quantitative research process as conducted in Part 2 of the study.

**Table 4.3: Summary of the quantitative research process**

Aspect/Method	Action
<b>Research instrument used:</b>	Self-administered web-based questionnaire
<b>Population:</b>	All South African apparel consumers that have purchased apparel-related items online from an apparel e-store in the past and that are listed on iFeedback's Interactive Direct permissioned database of a population of 350 000 members.
<b>Sample frame:</b>	<p>The inclusion criteria for the sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ South African male and female consumers that have bought apparel-related items from an apparel e-store (website) before;</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers that are older than 18 years;</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers that can read, write and speak English;</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers that have access to email and the Internet;</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers who have the time and willingness to participate; and</li> <li>▪ male and female consumers that are on the database of iFeedback.</li> </ul>
<b>Sampling method:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Non-probability sampling method</li> <li>▪ Judgement sampling technique</li> </ul>
<b>Sample size:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A sample size of 384 with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% is deemed appropriate for a population of 350 000.</li> <li>▪ However, due to that fact that factor analysis will be used to analyse the data, a larger sample size of <b>622</b> would be more valuable and reliable.</li> </ul>

<b>Data collection:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consumers that fell within the stipulated inclusion criteria, were emailed, requesting them to complete the self-administered web-based questionnaire.</li> <li>▪ The email invitation included the purpose of the study, the duration of the study, and that participation was voluntary and anonymous.</li> <li>▪ A hyperlink was provided in the email that redirected the participants to iFeedback's online system to complete the self-administered web-based questionnaire.</li> </ul>
<b>Data analysis:</b>	SPSS version 23 was used to conduct various statistical tests (Cronbach's Alpha and factor analysis)

Source: Author's own compilation

#### **4.4.6 STEP 6: Data analysis and findings**

After the qualitative and quantitative research processes were completed, the data gathered from both parts of the empirical study needed to be analysed for content and totality. Data analysis was discussed for each method in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2. A complete and detailed explanation and discussion of the findings will be given in Chapters 5 (qualitative research) and 6 (quantitative research) of this study. The final step in the marketing research process refers to the conclusions and recommendations, which are discussed below.

#### **4.4.7 STEP 7: Conclusions and recommendations**

The conclusion and recommendation step involves the interpretation of information that has been gathered, and the reporting of such information to management for decision making purposes (Cant, 2010:81). Possible recommendations are also made. For the purpose of this study, the conclusions and recommendations of this study are discussed in detail in Chapter 7 of this study.

### **4.5 RIGOUR AND ETHICS**

Triangulation in research can be described as the use of more than one approach to research a question, to increase confidence in the findings through the confirmation of a proposition using two or more independent measures (Heale & Forbes, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:13, 14, 200). The purpose of triangulation is to seek confirmation of apparent findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:200; Adami & Alice, 2005). Triangulation was confirmed in the study as mixed-method research was conducted and each method was discussed and confirmed by three statisticians.

As indicated in Section 4.2, a mixed-method research design was followed. The strategies that were implemented to confirm rigour for both the qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as the strategies to confirm ethics, are discussed in the section below.

#### **4.5.1 Strategies to ensure rigour**

In qualitative designs, validity and reliability are described through strategies for trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:199). This research operationalised the strategies of credibility, applicability, dependability and confirmability, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and briefly discussed below.

##### **4.5.1.1 Credibility**

Credibility as a strategy to measure trustworthiness, refers to whether the findings make logical sense and whether the findings are believable (Ngulube, 2017:142). As indicated in Section 4.4.4, the purpose of qualitative research is to explain the phenomena of interest from the perspective of the participant. For the purpose of this study, credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the participants during the focus group sessions to ensure that each participant understood the content of the questions correctly. Credibility was further on ensured through triangulation (Creswell, 2014:201), as the same questions were asked to all the participants, and the data was collected using different instruments (focus group interviews, short survey questionnaire and card sorting) and methods to answer the questions.

##### **4.5.1.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to whether the researcher provided enough information for the reader to determine the degree to which findings are applicable or transferable (Ngulube, 2017:142). In order words, transferability refers to the degree to which the results obtained from the qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other circumstances, environments or settings. From a qualitative perspective, the transfer of the research findings is the responsibility of the person doing the generalising.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher contributed to the transferability of the findings by explaining the research in detail. Further, transferability was enhanced by

providing an intense description of the background information and the use of judgement sampling that ensured the transferability of the research.

#### **4.5.1.3 Dependability**

Dependability refers to whether the findings of an investigation can be repeated if the inquiry were replicated under the same conditions (Ngulube, 2017:142). For the purpose of this study, dependability was ensured by code-recode procedures, as the same methods, measures and procedures were used in each focus group (including the short survey questionnaire and card sorting activity) session, and all the obtained data was coded and analysed similarly.

#### **4.5.1.4 Conformability**

According to Ngulube (2017:142), conformability refers to data that reflects reality as the participant sees it, which means that the findings are purely based on the responses of the participants and not on any form of personal motive or bias of the researcher.

For the purpose of this study, confirmability was ensured by checking and re-checking (Creswell, 2014:202) the data after each research technique activity (focus group session, short survey questionnaire and card sorting), and also by having the data reviewed by a third-party individual that is an expert in the field.

#### **4.5.2 Validity and reliability**

The purpose of validity and reliability is to provide decision-makers with information that is correct, timely and accurate to allow them to make better and more intelligent decisions (Clow & James, 2014:266). The reality is that errors, more specifically, systematic and random errors do occur which influence the accuracy and correctness of the measurement process. Validity and reliability address the issues of errors, where validity deals with systematic errors and reliability deals with random errors (Clow & James, 2014:267).

Validity refers to the degree to which a construct measures what it was supposed or designed to measure (Wiid & Diggins, 2015:242). It is important that the researcher checks that the overall scale consists of the correct constructs. To test the validity of the constructs in the questionnaire, exploratory factor analysis was performed to determine if each individual question loaded onto or contributed to the constructs in



the questionnaire. Further content validity was implemented where the measurement scale was provided to experts who determined that adequate coverage of the topic, online visual merchandising themes, was provided. As indicated in Section 4.4.5.2, the instrument was also pre-tested, which enabled the researcher to determine if each question did measure what it was supposed to measure.

Reliability refers to the ability of the measurement scale to provide consistent results over time (McDaniel & Gates, 2010:251). Therefore, an instrument is regarded as reliable if the measurement scales are free from errors and provide consistent data (Clow & James, 2014:267). The most popular internal consistency reliability method is Cronbach's alpha, which provides the reliability coefficients for all possible combinations of a set of items within a scale (Clow & James, 2014:268). The higher the Cronbach's alpha score, the more reliable the measure.

For the purpose of this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were determined for each of the sub-scales in the Likert scale. In terms of the reliability of these sub-scales, each coefficient was found to be higher than the desired 0.6 (Malhotra, 2010:319) and 0.7 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:154) value, which indicated that each sub-scale and factor related to the online visual merchandising themes was regarded as having good internal consistency and reliability.

### **4.5.3 Ethical strategies**

There are ethical strategies and principles that researchers need to incorporate in their research studies to ensure that no harm is done toward participants and respondents (Clow & James, 2014:49; Wiid & Diggins, 2015:25). Based on the Belmont report that was published in 1979, basic ethical principles and guidelines are needed to assist researchers in resolving any ethical problems that are associated with research involving human subjects (HHS.gov, 1979). The three basic principles that are particularly relevant to the ethics of research involving human subjects are the principles of respect for persons, beneficence and justice (HHS.gov, 1979). These three principles are discussed in the section below.

#### **4.5.3.1 *Respect for persons***

Based on the Belmont Report, respect for persons incorporates at least two ethical principles. Firstly, individuals should be treated independently, and secondly, people with less independence are entitled to protection (HHS.gov, 1979:4). Furthermore,

respect for persons emphasises that individuals enter into the research voluntarily and with adequate information (HHS.gov, 1979:4).

According Clow and James (2014:49), ESOMAR, a global organisation serving the marketing research industry, developed a guide to ethical research practice that addresses respondent issues. Based on ESOMAR's code of standards, respondents/participants have the right not to participate or to stop participating at any time, respondents/participants have the right to require that their information, as well as personal information, remains confidential, and lastly, respondents/participants have the right to expect safety and freedom from harm (Clow & James, 2014:49).

With regards to the study which this thesis is reporting on, each participant and respondent had the choice to be part of the study, as the consent letter stipulated that participation is voluntary and that any participant and respondent can withdraw from the research process at any time. Each participant in the qualitative research had to sign the consent letter (See Appendix C). With regards to the quantitative section, each participant 'signed' the consent letter if they agreed to begin the self-administered web-based questionnaire.

#### **4.5.3.2 *Beneficence***

Beneficence refers to the fact that individuals are not only treated in an ethical manner by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm, but also by making efforts to secure their well-being (HHS.gov, 1979:4). According to Wiid and Diggins (2015:27), an individual's welfare refers to their health, happiness and general well-being in terms of physical, economic and social conditions. Two general rules have been formulated as complementary expressions of beneficent actions: firstly, do not harm, and secondly, maximise potential benefits and minimise potential harms (HHS.gov, 1979:4).

With regards to this study, the researcher protected the welfare of the participants and respondents in both the qualitative and quantitative sections of the empirical study by minimising the potential risks. This was done by keeping sensitive questions to a minimum, if any. The only sensitive questions were the demographics-related questions, and as indicated, the personal identifiers of the respondents and participants will not be made available due to the anonymity of the study. Furthermore, the welfare of both the respondents and participants was protected, as relevant

information regarding the risks of the specific qualitative and quantitative research was clearly communicated to the participants and respondents before they had to make the decision to participate/respond or not.

#### **4.5.3.3 *Justice***

Justice refers to the quality of being fair and reasonable in the way the researcher treats all the individuals participating in the research study (Amdur & Bankert, 2011:38). It is important that no participant should be exposed to extra burden, and all the participants should get the same benefits from the research study (Amdur & Bankert, 2011:39).

With regards to this study, all participants and respondents were chosen based on the researcher's judgement of the specifically stated inclusion criteria (see Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2).

Additionally to the three principles of ethical research discussed above, the researcher of this study can confirm the following:

- The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the relevant sub-unit ethical committee of the University of South Africa (Unisa). (Refer to Appendix A.)
- The researcher declared that she had read the Policy on Research Ethics of Unisa and that the contents of this research study are a true and accurate reflection of the methodological and ethical implications, and that the confidentiality of all the data collected from the research participants will be maintained and kept safe and secured, thereby not harming any of the participants and respondents.
- Informed consent was obtained from all participants and respondents by means of a letter communicating the necessary information pertaining to the research. (Refer to Appendix C.)
- Confidentiality was maintained through the anonymity of responses and participation was voluntary.

## **4.6 LIMITATIONS**

The following limitations are associated with this research study:

- The qualitative research incorporated an exploratory design which was qualitative in nature. A non-probability judgement sampling method was implemented which

can be regarded as a limitation, as the findings cannot be generalised to the greater population. It would therefore be advisable for future researchers to select a more representative sample.

- Furthermore, based on the above point, the sample for the qualitative section was drawn from consumers living in the Gauteng province that met the inclusion criteria, and was therefore not geographically representative of all nine provinces of South Africa. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the main aim was not to be representative, but rather to be able to use the research findings for the quantitative section that followed.
- The quantitative section centred on the non-probability, judgement sampling technique which was used in the study and which may limit the generalisability of the results. Whilst the sample may be representative in terms of the demographics of the population of online shoppers, the majority of the respondents emanated from the Gauteng area, and may thus not be representative of the broader South African population.
- Furthermore, the sampling technique may have contributed to smaller sample sizes for the various groups within the sample which made statistical comparison between all the groups within the sample untenable. In addition to this, the online sampling method (refer to the self-administered web-based questionnaire) that was used led to a high number of missing data within the sample, which may have an impact on the results of the statistical analyses.
- All persons who indicated that they cannot read, speak or write English were excluded from both the qualitative and quantitative research, as this was a requirement based on the inclusion criteria as stipulated in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2.
- Any male and female consumers who have not purchased apparel-related products online from an e-store in the past, could also not be part of the study, as this was a requirement based on the inclusion criteria as stipulated in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2.

## **4.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on the research methodology that was applied to collect and analyse the required data that was needed to achieve the primary objective of the research study. The chapter commenced with a brief discussion of the research paradigms and framework development, followed by the research process that focused on the problem statement, the objectives and research design of the study. Thereafter, each qualitative and quantitative section was discussed separately in terms of the data-collection instrument, the sample, and data analysis methods. The chapter ended with a discussion of the strategies to ensure rigour, the ethical principles and the limitations associated with this study.

The following chapter presents the research findings obtained from the qualitative research done Part 1 of the empirical study.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

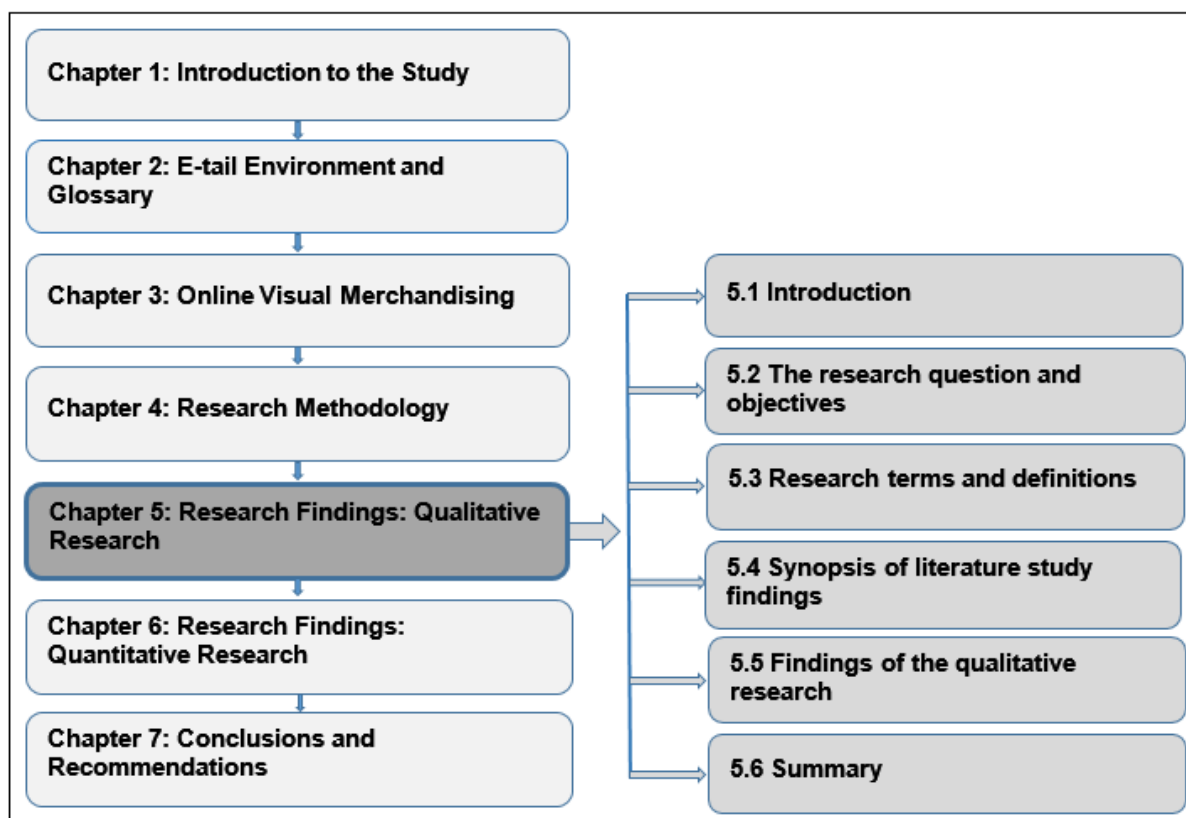
#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The first three chapters presented the introduction to the study, the e-tail environment and the online visual merchandising themes, respectively. Chapter 4 highlighted the methodological processes that were implemented to achieve the objectives of the study. The focus of this chapter is on the findings of the qualitative research done in the first part of the empirical study as described in Chapter 4.

The findings obtained from the qualitative research are discussed in this chapter to address the research objectives of this study as outlined in Chapter 1 (introduction) as well as in Chapter 4 (methodology). The qualitative research mainly consisted of four focus group interviews. Together with the focus group interviews, participants were asked to complete a short survey questionnaire and participate in a card sorting activity. The order in which the three activities took place was first, and most importantly, the focus group interview, then the completion of the short survey questionnaire and lastly the card sorting activity. The findings obtained from the three activities (focus groups, short survey questionnaire, card sorting) are discussed in this order and are presented in various forms: themes, categories, quotes, as well as tables and figures. The findings obtained from the quantitative research, the second part of the empirical study, are discussed in Chapter 6.

This chapter commences with a discussion of the research question and objectives, followed by a discussion of the research terms and definitions. Thereafter, the findings of the literature study are discussed, followed by a detailed discussion of the findings of the qualitative research (in the order it took place). The chapter concludes with a summary.

Figure 5.1 depicts the overall layout of the study, including where Chapter 5 fits in and the expected layout of Chapter 5.



**Figure 5.1: Structure of Chapter 5**

Source: Author's own compilation

As indicated in Figure 5.1, the section that follows deals with the research question and objectives of the study.

## **5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES**

The research question and objectives of this study, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 4, are given below to place the research results in perspective.

### **5.2.1 The research question**

The research question which was derived from the preliminary literature review is stated as follows: Apparel retailers use visual merchandising themes for various reasons, such as to enhance the overall shopping experience and to display and promote the apparel items in a visually appealing manner to generate interest and ultimately sales, can apparel e-tailers use the online visual merchandising themes to the same effect?

### **5.2.2 The primary objective**

The primary research objective of the study is to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that can be used by apparel e-tailers in South Africa to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

### **5.2.3 The secondary objectives**

The secondary objectives, as derived from the primary objective are as follows:

- to identify visual merchandising themes that need to be incorporated into an online visual merchandising framework from a consumer's perspective;
- to determine the factors that decrease the likelihood of consumers purchasing online;
- to determine the reasons why consumers are purchasing online;
- to develop an online visual merchandising framework containing concepts based on the identified online visual merchandising themes;
- to determine the relationships (propositions) among the conceptual framework constructs; and
- to identify areas for future research.

The following section provides an explanation of the research terms and definitions used in this chapter.

## **5.3 RESEARCH TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

Two research terms that are used throughout this chapter are 'themes' and 'categories'. Themes and categories are part of the thematic analysis process that was used as data analysis method in the qualitative research part of the empirical study.

### **5.3.1 Themes**

Themes can be described as 'umbrella' constructs that are generally identified by the researcher before, after and during the data collection. A theme can therefore be seen as a cluster of linked categories that express the same meaning (Nell, 2013:103). According to Cooper and Schindler (2008:37), the term 'construct' can be defined as "... an image or idea specifically invented for a given research and/or theory-building



purpose". Ryan and Bernard (in Welman *et al.*, 2005: 211) identified the following techniques that are generally used when identifying themes:

- Word analyses: Word repetitions, keywords in context and original terms;
- Reading for larger units: For example, comparing material and searching for missing information;
- Intentional analysis of linguistic features: Metaphors, transitions and connectors; and
- The physical manipulation of text: Unmarked texts, pawing and cut-and-sort procedures.

### **5.3.2 Categories**

A category is a group of 'things' that have some qualities in common (Nell, 2013:101), for example, frustration, sadness and happiness can all be categorised or classified as 'emotions'. Welman *et al.* (2005:212) explained that a researcher should identify the important words and meanings that a specific group have attached to specific categories and let them (group of individuals) explain the meaning of these words. Therefore to categorise is to make something part of a system or classification (Visagie & Maritz, 2009:12).

The section below provides a short synopsis on the findings of the literature study conducted in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 in order to place the rest of the findings in perspective.

## **5.4 SYNOPSIS OF LITERATURE STUDY FINDINGS**

As indicated in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3, a detailed literature study was conducted to identify the existing online visual merchandising themes. It was deemed necessary to conduct research into secondary data to develop a list of the existing online visual merchandising themes to be used as the basis for the qualitative study. The results from the literature review were derived from various theoretical sources, such as textbooks, internet searches, journal articles (various research databases were consulted, which included Google Scholar, Emerald, Elsevier, EBSCOhost and Science Direct), and academic studies, to name only a few. The information found on the existing themes was discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.6, Table 3.1).

An extensive content analysis was done, where all possible research studies on the topic in the literature domain were analysed and compared to ensure that all duplicate online visual merchandising themes were removed. From the literature, 12 online visual merchandising themes were identified, each with various categories that make up the main themes (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6, and Table 3.1).

After the data had been organised into themes and categories, the themes and categories were reviewed to ensure that the data was categorised correctly. Consequently, all the themes and categories were reviewed again to determine whether some of the themes or categories could be merged or replaced by others.

The identified list of online visual merchandising themes, including their categories, can be viewed in Appendix E. A total of 12 online visual merchandising themes and 84 categories were identified from the literature review.

## **5.5 FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

This discussion of the findings of the qualitative section is divided in four main sections. The first section (Section 5.5.1) provides a brief background discussion of the qualitative research that was done in Part 1 of the empirical study. The second section (Section 5.5.2) discusses the sample used in the qualitative research. The third section (Section 5.5.3) presents a detailed discussion of the findings obtained from each data-collection method (focus groups, short survey questionnaire and card sorting), and the fourth section (Section 5.5.4) summarises the research findings of the qualitative section.

### **5.5.1 Background of the qualitative research**

The qualitative research done in Part 1 of the study was explorative in nature and adopted a qualitative approach utilising semi-structured focus group interviews and a survey instrument (refer to Chapter 4 Section 4.4.5.1 for a detailed discussion). The qualitative section centred on the further identification and delineation of the existing online visual merchandising themes for apparel e-tailers in South Africa.

The aim was to explore and gain insight into the opinions of online apparel consumers regarding the existing online visual merchandising themes used by apparel e-stores, as well as the identification of any additional online visual merchandising themes that

could lead to the stimulation of online apparel sales from the consumers' perspective (secondary research objective one).

Data collected for the qualitative section stemmed from four semi-structured focus group interviews regarding the existing online visual merchandising themes used on apparel e-stores, and as identified from the literature. After the fourth focus group discussion, a point of saturation was reached, as no more new information was obtained from the groups. In addition to the focus group interviews, the participants were also required to complete a short survey questionnaire regarding the online visual merchandising themes. Finally, the participants were asked to rate the various online visual merchandising themes in terms of importance using a card sorting technique.

The data collected in the qualitative section was analysed using thematic analyses, as well as basic descriptive statistics. Percentages and frequencies were utilised, where applicable, to provide a robust indication of the importance of the extracted themes based on the existing themes.

The findings generated from the qualitative research are presented below in Tables 5.3 to 5.15, providing each online visual merchandising theme together with categories, as identified from the research.

Due to the use of qualitative research, verbatim quotations are given as evidence and justification of the inclusion of each theme and category based on their importance. The quotations also provide a more detailed understanding in terms of the participants' perspectives of the specific theme and category. Furthermore, the quotations show how the researcher's findings developed and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

The section below provides a detailed discussion of the sample participating in the qualitative research. After the sample discussion, the findings obtained from the three data-collection activities (focus group interviews, short survey questionnaire and card sorting) are discussed.

#### **5.5.2 Sample of the qualitative research**

The sample size consisted of four focus group interviews each with six participants, therefore there was a total sample size of 24 participants for the qualitative research.

A detailed breakdown of the sample is provided in Table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1: Demographic breakdown of sample**

	<b>N n = 24</b>	<b>Percentage 100%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	2	8.30
Female	22	91.70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 25	2	8.30
26 – 35	15	62.50
36 – 45	6	25.00
46 – 60	0	0
61 – 65	1	4.20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Employment status</b>		
Unemployed	1	4.20
Employed by Organisation	20	83.30
Self-employed	3	12.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Income</b>		
R0 - R5000	1	4.20
R6000 - R12 000	1	4.20
R13 000 - R20 000	4	16.70
R21 000 - R30 000	6	25.00
R30 000+	12	50.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Shopping frequency</b>		
Yearly	2	8.30
2 - 3 times per year	4	16.7
Once a month	10	41.70
2 - 3 times per month	6	25.00
More than 3 times per month	2	8.30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>

	<b>N n = 24</b>	<b>Percentage 100%</b>
<b>Purpose for shopping</b>		
Self	8	33.30
Others	0	0
Self and others	16	66.70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own compilation

As depicted in Table 5.1, the majority (62.50%) of the participants were between the ages of 26 and 35, and 25% were between the ages of 36 and 45. Of the participants, 83.3% indicated that they were employed by an organisation, 12.50% indicated that they were self-employed, and only 4.20% of the participants indicated that they were unemployed. With regards to income, 50% of the participants indicated that they receive an income of higher than R30 000 per month. Furthermore, 41.70% of the participants mentioned that they shop online at least once a month, followed by 25% of participants that shop online two to three times a month. Finally, more than half of the participants (66.70%) indicated that they predominantly buy products online for both themselves and others, whereas 33.30% of the participants indicated that they shop mostly for themselves.

The three data-collection activities and the findings of each activity are discussed in the sections below.

### **5.5.3 Findings of the qualitative research**

In the interest of clarity, the findings will be presented by firstly examining the findings from the semi-structured focus group interviews (Section 5.5.3.1), followed by an examination of the data stemming from the short survey questionnaire (Section 5.5.3.2) and lastly, the card sorting activity (Section 5.5.3.3).

#### **5.5.3.1 Findings: Semi-structured focus group interviews**

A total of four focus group discussions were held, and each group consisted of six participants. The participants (South African online apparel consumers) were selected based on the inclusion criteria as discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.5.1.

The focus group interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule (refer to Appendix D and E) with participants being asked to discuss each of the online visual merchandising themes and categories, as depicted in Table 5.2; focusing on the importance of each theme and category in terms of online apparel purchasing. Participants were also asked to identify any additional online visual merchandising themes that e-tailers may consider using on their e-stores.

**Table 5.2: Online visual merchandising themes and categories**

<b>Virtual Layout and Design</b>	<b>Website Content</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website structure and layout</li> <li>▪ Navigation design</li> <li>▪ Website design</li> <li>▪ Visual appeal</li> <li>▪ Website functionality</li> <li>▪ Website geometric</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information in general</li> <li>▪ Content quality</li> <li>▪ Quick and easy to work website</li> </ul>
<b>Website Navigation</b>	<b>Virtual Atmospherics</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Search engine tools</li> <li>▪ Categorisation of items</li> <li>▪ Related website links/category links</li> <li>▪ Site map</li> <li>▪ Logical menu option</li> <li>▪ Website quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Music</li> <li>▪ Videos</li> <li>▪ Pictures</li> <li>▪ Background colour</li> <li>▪ Text/style of text/types of fonts</li> <li>▪ Font colour</li> </ul>
<b>Product Presentation/Technique</b>	<b>Product Information</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Type of product view</li> <li>▪ Presentation method (2D/3D)</li> <li>▪ Zoom function</li> <li>▪ Colour/fabric swatches</li> <li>▪ Colour presentation</li> <li>▪ Mix-and-match/garment coordination</li> <li>▪ Human models</li> <li>▪ Mannequins</li> <li>▪ Display flat surface/hanger</li> <li>▪ Videos</li> <li>▪ Various body shapes</li> <li>▪ Location of image</li> <li>▪ Number of images per item</li> <li>▪ Product density</li> <li>▪ Image quality and size</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Detailed size indication</li> <li>▪ Textile or material image (fabric swatch)</li> <li>▪ Fibre content</li> <li>▪ Sewing indication/quality</li> <li>▪ Price indication</li> <li>▪ Colour information</li> <li>▪ Product stock indication</li> <li>▪ Mix-and-match/garment coordination</li> <li>▪ Place of manufacturing</li> <li>▪ Product comparison</li> <li>▪ Garment details</li> </ul>

<b>Virtual Theatrics</b>	<b>Virtual Social Presence</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Animations/cartoons</li> <li>▪ Fun</li> <li>▪ Inviting</li> <li>▪ Exciting</li> <li>▪ Vividness/media richness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communities</li> <li>▪ Communication with e-tailer</li> <li>▪ Recommendations by website</li> <li>▪ Avatars</li> <li>▪ Product reviews/General customer reviews</li> <li>▪ Social media</li> <li>▪ Crowding/traffic on website</li> <li>▪ Interaction tool</li> </ul>
<b>Customer Service</b>	<b>Security</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Responsiveness</li> <li>▪ Shipping cost and information</li> <li>▪ Willingness to help</li> <li>▪ Delivery terms indication</li> <li>▪ Return policy indication</li> <li>▪ E-tailer information</li> <li>▪ Custom-made services</li> <li>▪ Problem solving (FAQ's)</li> <li>▪ Registration requirements</li> <li>▪ E-store events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protection of privacy</li> <li>▪ Safe transactions</li> <li>▪ Ability to trust website</li> <li>▪ Incorporated security features</li> </ul>
<b>Web Advertising</b>	<b>Website Brand</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online sale promotions/advertising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Image</li> <li>▪ Personality</li> <li>▪ Brand ensures trust/reduces perceived risk</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own compilation

The reasons why participants partake in online shopping activities became evident from the overall focus group discussions. The primary reasons identified by participants centred on the convenience of online shopping, as well as the perception of a greater variety and availability of products online.

With regards to convenience, the participants highlighted the fact that they can shop from the comfort of their own home without having to go to the shops, the time convenience of shopping online which allows you to shop at any time, as well as the ability to easily browse and identify the available products/items. This was highlighted by the following quotations:

- *“...the convenience of shopping online – you just have to order and you know that it’s going to be delivered. You don’t have to go to the shops, dragging the children”*
- *“...I prefer not standing in the line, and just buying it online is quicker and easier”*
- *“...I also like to browse to see what they have, and it’s convenient – I don’t like to go in-store, there’s too many people”*
- *“...being able to shop twenty-four seven, especially if you’re not in the mood to go out or you’re bored at home – you can just sit and browse”*
- *“...if there’s a sale online, you can, in the convenience of your own home, go through it and it’s easy to see what’s available – instead of rummaging through a pile”*
- *“...online allows you, shall we say, almost a measure of exclusivity, because not everybody’s shopping online”*

Apart from the convenience factor associated with shopping online, participants further identified the availability of products online, which are not always available in-store, as a determining factor for shopping online, along with the perception that online shopping gives an individual access to a wider range and variety of products as opposed to shopping in-store. This was highlighted by the following quotations:

- *“...so you can do it online and you make sure that you get the item straight away, because you know, sometimes when you put your heart on this one and when I get to the shop it’s sold out”*
- *“...online you assume they would have everything that they would have if they had one big shop with all the clothes – so I think that’s the, one of the reasons why we also go online, to see everything”*
- *“...there are certain brands that you can’t find in the stores and even though you have to wait longer cause you get it from overseas, you can still get the brand that you want”*
- *“...you don’t have to walk from one store to the next store to – you can go onto one place and search a lot of brands and options”*
- *“...if you can’t find the colour you’re looking for of the garment in-store, you go and check online and you have access to the whole range”*
- *“...the availability, and the selection, is bigger”*



The participants were also asked about the reasons why they do not take part in, or are hesitant to shop for apparel-related-items online. It was found from the overall focus group discussions that the overall size description of items are a problem, together with return policies that are not clearly explained, expensive delivery fees and payment options that do not seem to be safe.

With regards to size descriptions, the participants highlighted that if there are no clear size measurements or charts it has a negative influence on their purchasing behaviour, especially if the sizes is given in other than South African measurements. Participants indicated that they would prefer a detailed measurement size chart showing the exact centimetre measurement per size.

- *“...no measurements sizing on the website. Yes, cause if they have the measurement guide, you can, cause – I know exactly what my – centimetres of my foot is and if they show you, okay this is a thirty-nine – so it’s a twenty-five point five centimetres, I’d know factually that thing would fit me”*
- *“...I ordered shoes once, similar website, but again I-I’m a thirty-nine, and I had to go forty or forty-one on that website but because they had the centimetres, so I could see okay so they actually a forty or forty-one for my centimetres”*
- *“...Another thing that’s really irritates me is the sizing guide, but sometimes they only have like the US sizes and then you have to go and Google, okay so what’s my actually size in US. So, that’s also quite irritating”*
- *“...If there’s not a proper size card or if it’s, especially, um, a website which is not locally based, which are making use of other type of sizes, then it becomes also a schlepp”*

Another factor decreasing the likelihood of shopping online that participants highlighted was insufficient information regarding the e-tailer’s return policy. Especially in terms of how the item(s) should be returned, how much time they have before they need to return the item(s) and if any costs were involved in returning the item. It was clear from the focus group discussions that the convenience of purchasing online is very important to them, but the moment that the participants feel that it is not convenient anymore, they will not partake in the online purchase.

- *“...Yes, I actually bought something, um, on Edgars’ website, but while it’s nice, if you don’t like the item, you can take it back to any Edgars store with no issues- But again that is the problem is, then you could have just as well gone to any Edgars store and buy it- So your return policy, or return feature is not convenient for you as a consumer. So, what’s the use of doing it online then you can just as well go fit it and then walk out”*
- *“...so if there’s no clear return policy, you won’t shop, or if it’s a schlep to return something you’re not going to go ahead with the purchase”*
- *“...um, I think it would be a schlepp to return it, or because-because it’s such a convenience factor, I think you must look at the inconvenience factor as well”*
- *“...the convenience of going to a store is much quicker than returning it online, cause then you wait for it, ag they could be a month, or whatever until you get a return and you got-you got to wait for that month almost to have that money back and, and then go buy again, you know, sort of time convenience there is, is a problem”*
- *“...So, for example, um, in my experience, if you bought something online and you’re not happy with is, they will come and collect it from you”*
- *“...But if you need to go to the actual—either to the actual store, or to a post office to send the parcel back, then you’re not going to shop online - I would rather then just, um, leave it”*
- *“...so when it comes through the return policy - if you can’t just click, click, click, uh, go to your history, this is what you purchased last, clink on return and then know it’s going to be sent-picked up by a courier and sent back and then give-give you credit online. But I don’t know if they have that”*
- *“...Um, and then also, the, the time of the return policy. Yet again if I don’t get thirty days maybe I might get seven days, I might not buy from them. And also if I’m not allowed to return items, I won’t buy anything from that store”*
- *“...If you have to pay for delivery - For the returns - For me that’s a no-no”*
- *“...I know some websites, if you want to return something, they will come and fetch it from your specific location. Other ones you actually need to take-go to Post Office or to a courier company”*

- *“...I don’t think I’ll purchase from them if I have to go to the place and-if-if I’m buying online, then they need to come and fetch it from me”*
- *“...There mustn’t be a cost”*
- *“Yes, time-cost sort of thing, you know you want to be quick and efficient, but don’t make me spend more time to get my-your product back to you, sort of thing. So, I think, time”*
- *“...I think then they-they go against their promise or their purpose- You’re telling me convenience and it’s online and whatever, delivery, but then you making me work for it if I have to return it”*

The participants also touched on the aspect of delivery in general, and indicated that if the delivery fee was too high, or if the delivery period took too long, they will not purchase from that e-tailer. The participants also indicated that they would rather spend a threshold amount to receive free delivery.

- *“...and time of delivery like a month, nah-uh, for me that’s a no-no”*
- *“...free delivery is a big thing for me”*
- *“...I’m fine if there has to be a thresholds that you have to reach, but, I want free delivery”*
- *“...I am cross if I have to pay delivery on top of that”*
- *“...So on Spree they, they do give the options what type of delivery you want, so I must say - the free delivery one is, like they say three to five days”*
- *“...they’ll still give you an option- let’s say if you want it immediately then you would pay a fee, but free delivery will then still be two or three days later”*

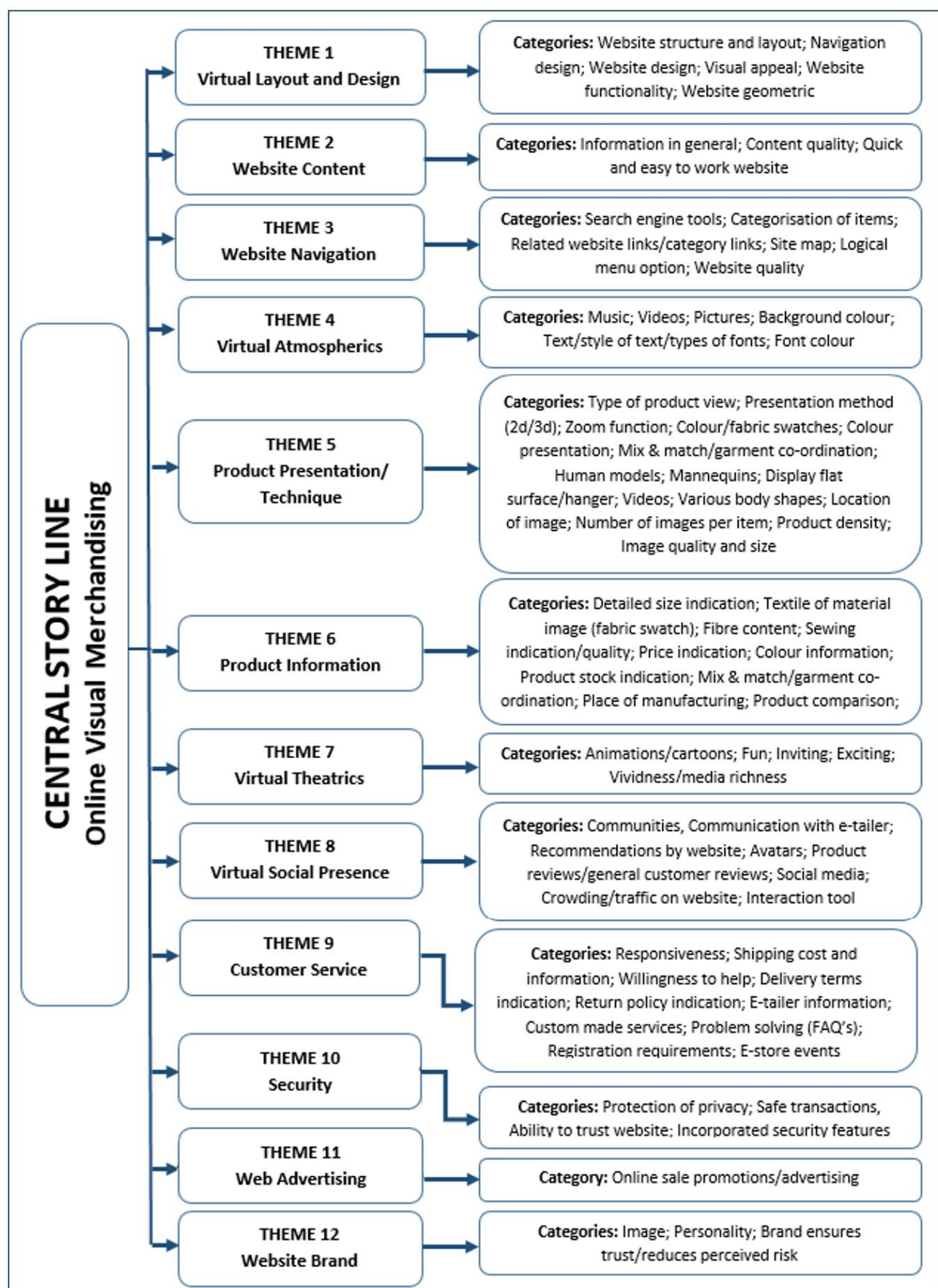
Lastly, concerning the security of paying online, participants indicated that if there are no alternative options, such as EFT or PayPal, they would not purchase from that e-tailer, especially if the e-tailer is unknown, and also if the currency value is not showing in South African rand. The participants also mentioned that if they experience any problems with the payment method on the e-store, they would leave the e-store immediately.

- *“...I also think security, I mean you know well-known sites and you’ve shopped from them before, but I don’t necessarily- last night my husband*

*was looking at a tennis thing for my son, it's like a swing ball but an advanced one. I said to him that 'I don't know that site, is it safe? And he said but he thinks they've got PayPal, it should be fine. That's the only thing I think that would really put me off is, is the security of using your card'*

- *"...and if you go through the whole process and you want to pay and the payment doesn't want to go through then you have to type everything in again, and then I just, yes, I'd rather just leave, leave it"*
- *"...then you probably won't go back. The currency that the website is in. If it's not in South African rand and that irritates me"*
- *"For me the security, uh, because you have to put in your bank details or your credit card details, um, I always try and do like the option like if I can EFT it instead of putting my bank, uh, details online. Um, and like my credit card, it has been now like, fraud happening on it for like the third time now- it's because I buy online"*
- *"...Well, ugh, because it's happened so much and it- I still buy online, but it just limits, uh, the sites that I go to. So, I'll go to Spree, I'll go to Superbalist, like, because those sites I've bought on previously and I've checked their security. But like if it's a site that I don't know, I would rather send an EFT or do, uh, uh, do a payment another way"*
- *"...Pay cash on delivery"*
- *"...So, I wouldn't buy from websites that are not credible. So it needs to be well known sites. If it's not credible, they need to have an EFT option. If they don't have an EFT option I won't give my details on there, cause it's not a site that I know of"*

Each theme and its categories were discussed in the focus group sessions to gain insight into and understanding of the perspectives of South African online apparel consumers regarding the existing online visual merchandising themes. Participants had to indicate which themes they felt were important or not, and whether the theme would influence them to purchase apparel-related products online. The findings were discussed according to Tesch's model (thematic analysis), where a central story line was formed. Twelve themes were identified out of the central story line, and each theme consisted of a number of categories, as indicated in Figure 5.2 below.



**Figure 5.2: Online visual merchandising themes and categories**

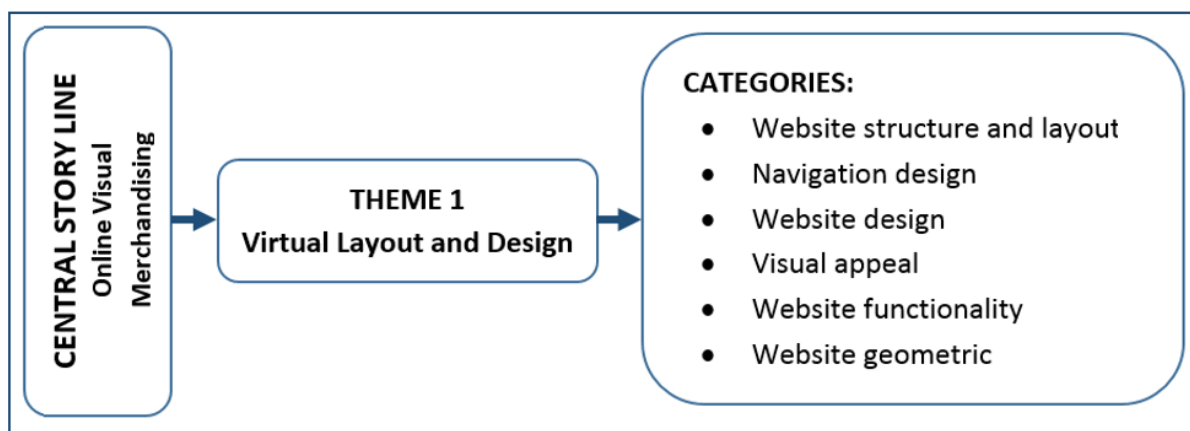
Source: Author's own compilation

Each main theme, together with its categories is discussed below, according to the layout of the representation of the themes in Figure 5.2 above. The order of category discussion per theme will differ, as all the categories are discussed in the order of importance, which range from “yes”, ‘nice to have’, to ‘no’. Some of the categories that were regarded as not being important (no) are not discussed.

The first theme is virtual layout and design.

### ***Theme 1: Virtual Layout and Design***

Figure 5.3 below, illustrates theme 1, as derived from Figure 5.2 above.



**Figure 5.3: Theme 1: Virtual layout and design**

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 5.3 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Visual Layout and Design, and the importance of each, as identified by the participants.

**Table 5.3: Virtual layout and design importance of category**

CATEGORY		IMPORTANCE
1	Website Structure And Layout	Yes
2	Navigation Design	Yes
3	Website Design	Yes
4	Visual Appeal	Yes
5	Website Functionality	Yes
6	Website Geometric	Yes

Source: Author's own compilation

As illustrated in Table 5.3, the participants indicated that all the various categories associated with Visual Layout and Design were important and would influence their online purchasing.

- **Category 1: Structure and Layout**

Overall, participants indicated that the Structure and Layout provide the first impression for the consumer of the website and that a bad first impression will decrease their likelihood of shopping on that specific website. Furthermore, participants indicated that they prefer a clean, simple and organised layout and structure which is free of clutter. In line with this, participants indicated that they prefer a more standardised layout which they are accustomed to.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 1:

- *“...I think your structure is like your first impression, um, so if you look at it quickly and you don’t get a first good impression, you’re kinda like ‘ugh’ okay – I’m not going to waste my time on that”*
- *“...I think the visual layout is important because it affects the time I spend online”*
- *“...We shop with our eyes and if it’s very distracting if things are all over the place, it’s not as easy to use”*
- *“...if things are not easy to find I might get very irritated and just go and search on another website for what I’m looking for”*
- *“...a standardised type of layout is actually nice. No clutter, clean, simple”*
- *“...it should be easy, should be clean, should be simple”*
- *“...too much clutter will throw me off of a website”*

- **Category 2: Navigation Design**

In terms of Navigation Design, participants were asked to discuss the importance and layout of bars, hyperlinks, image map, drop-down menus, collapsible menus, and search options on a website. Overall, participants indicated that the navigation design is a key factor impacting on their online purchasing. Participants indicated that they do not necessarily like the use of hyperlinks as it may delay the time it takes to search for, and make an online purchase. Participants also felt that hyperlinks which direct

you to different pages may further delay the process or may cause you to lose your previous search options. Finally, the annoyance of hyperlinks that do not work on a website was also highlighted as a factor which may negatively impact on participants' online shopping.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 2:

- *"...no, I don't like a hyperlink. It takes longer to see what you want to see – just show me what you want to show me straight away"*
- *"...as long as it doesn't direct you to a different webpage, then you basically lose your previous search"*
- *"...I don't want to shop the same product at a different place, I want to make use of your website – so, don't direct me to something else"*
- *"...if the link isn't working then it's annoying. It's different and okay if you click on it and then it goes to where it's supposed to go"*

Participants indicated that image maps were not a crucial factor which would impact on their purchasing, but that it may be helpful when you cannot find something on the website:

- *"...if it's not immediately obvious on those little bars at the top, sometimes you're looking for something then you'll go to the site map just to check if it's maybe hidden"*
- *"...it's not going to make you change your decision on purchasing or not purchasing, but it's nice to have, if it's not there you're going to miss it"*

With regards to the menus used on a website, the participants indicated that they were important but that their importance is linked to where in the shopping process you find yourself. Participants indicated that menus are useful for when you are browsing but that the search function is more important and useful if you are looking for a specific product or know what you are looking for.

Furthermore, participants again highlighted the importance of the standardised layout in terms of the search option, with the majority of participants indicating that they prefer the standardised layout with the search option located in the top right hand corner of the website:



- *“...it depends where in the process you are at. If it still about finding something, yes, then it’s good”*
- *“...definitely need the search option, otherwise, you have to sift through everything and do the filtering yourself”*
- *“...something that irritates me is if the search box isn’t where it normally is”*
- *“...if it’s not easy to find I might get very irritated and just go and search on another website”*

- **Category 3: Website Design**

In relation to the design of the website (the overall attractiveness of the website), participants again highlighted the fact that they prefer a website which is not complicated and is not cluttered. Importantly, participants linked the design of the website with the overall online shopping experience, the trust associated with the website, as well as the link between the design of the website and the impression it generates with regards to the brand. Overall, website design was identified by participants as a key theme which would impact on their online shopping.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 3:

- *“...it mustn’t be too complicated and not too cluttered”*
- *“...it’s not the reason that you’re shopping on the site but it does add to your overall experience of using the site”*
- *“...it determines the look and the feel of a website. If the website looks cheaply designed then I won’t shop there. There will be trust issues there. It’s already a risk – you don’t feel it’s secured enough”*
- *“...I just think if a website is well designed you just have a better impression. The brand is better because of it”*

- **Category 4: Visual Appeal**

In relation to visual appeal, which was linked in the discussion to the organisation of the layout of a website, the participants indicated that they prefer a well organised and structured layout. Furthermore, the organisation of the layout of the website was again

linked to the overall attractiveness of the website, as well as the overall image of the company/brand and the product.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 4:

- *“...the more organised it is the better. That’s better than it being pretty because if it’s well organised, it’s obviously a better overall image of the company and of the product”*
- *“...it’s like eating a nice salad – you won’t eat an unattractive salad”*

- **Category 5: Website Functionality**

The functionality of the website, in terms of the layout of the website enabling the consumer to easily search for products or to quickly go to a menu to search for something specific, and the way that the website functions as a whole, was identified as a crucially important theme, and a factor which would definitely impact on whether they would purchase online.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 5:

- *“...if you click, it needs to work”*
- *“...links must actually work and take you to the right stuff”*
- *“...the layout will obviously also contribute to the functionality”*

- **Category 6: Website Geometric**

Finally, with regards to the orientation or the position of major buttons, participants indicated that it would be a determining factor for them to purchase online from a specific site. Again, participants highlighted the fact that they would prefer a more standardised layout, with the major buttons and functions located in familiar positions where they would usually be found.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 6:

- *“...when I go on every single website, I expect in the right hand corner there’s going to be a search bar”*

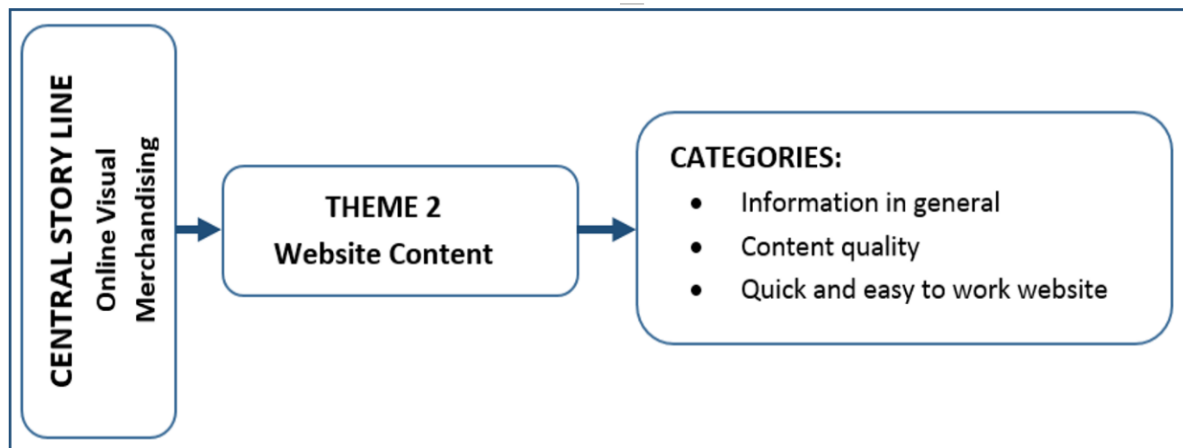
- “...a lot of websites put the search bar at the bottom – so you have to scroll and that irritates me”
- “...the search bar is usually on the top right – if it’s on the left I’m going to be confused”
- “...like the checkout where you actually have to say checkout and pay – if it’s not clear and you have to search for it, I’ll stop the process”

Overall, in terms of Virtual Layout and Design, the participants stressed the importance of a simple, clear, organised and standardised layout. Furthermore, the participants indicated that without proper navigation themes and features, such as the search functions or category menus, they would not continue with their online purchasing. Participants also emphasised the role which the virtual layout and design of a website plays in terms of impacting the trust and brand perception of consumers. Virtual Layout and Design is thus a critical factor which will impact on online purchasing for participants.

The next theme is Website Content and is discussed below.

### **Theme 2: Website Content**

Figure 5.4 below illustrates theme 2, Website Content, as derived from Figure 5.2



**Figure 5.4: Theme 2: Website content**

Source: Author’s own compilation

Table 5.4 below, provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Website Content and the importance of each as identified by the participants.

**Table 5.4: Website content importance of category**

CATEGORY		IMPORTANCE
1	Information in General	Nice to have
2	Content Quality	Yes
3	Quick and Easy to Work Website	Yes

- **Category 1 and 2: Information and Content Quality**

With regard to Website Content, the participants specifically highlighted the importance of the completeness of the information available and the importance of detailed information regarding the delivery terms, return policy and payment options available. The participants, however, did not feel that the retailers' information on the website was a crucial theme (see Table 5.4 above). They indicated that they do not really want that information unless it is not a well-known e-tailer. Despite this, they still felt that although they do not necessarily read this information, it must be there if they want to read it.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1 and 2:

- *“...I think completeness is important for certain things, like for example the return policy and shipping terms and stuff like that so you don't have to follow up the whole time”*
- *“...it must be well written with no spelling mistakes, especially if you're a top brand' I want to see the specifications”*
- *“...delivery information, the return policy etc. – they need to have a detailed list about that. Maybe some information on payment options and if it's credible. That's the first thing I look at. Also a FAQ section, I always look at that”*
- *“...contact information for various platforms. So, like emails, phone, all that, and also head office and so forth, because sometimes the staff that are at the call centre can't really assist you, so you want to get that further step so you can get help”*
- *“...I don't necessarily have to read it. It must just be there”*

- *“...I don’t want to know about the company It’s nice to have it if you want to look at something but it’s not the reason that you’re there”*
- *“...it also depends how well known the brand is – if it’s this new brand that you don’t really know you probably want to read up more”*
- *“...I don’t think it will stop me from buying, but it does add interest to the websites”*

- **Category 3: Quick and Easy to Work Website**

In line with the above, participants indicated that it was important that the website must be quick and easy to work with and it must ultimately be user-friendly.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 3:

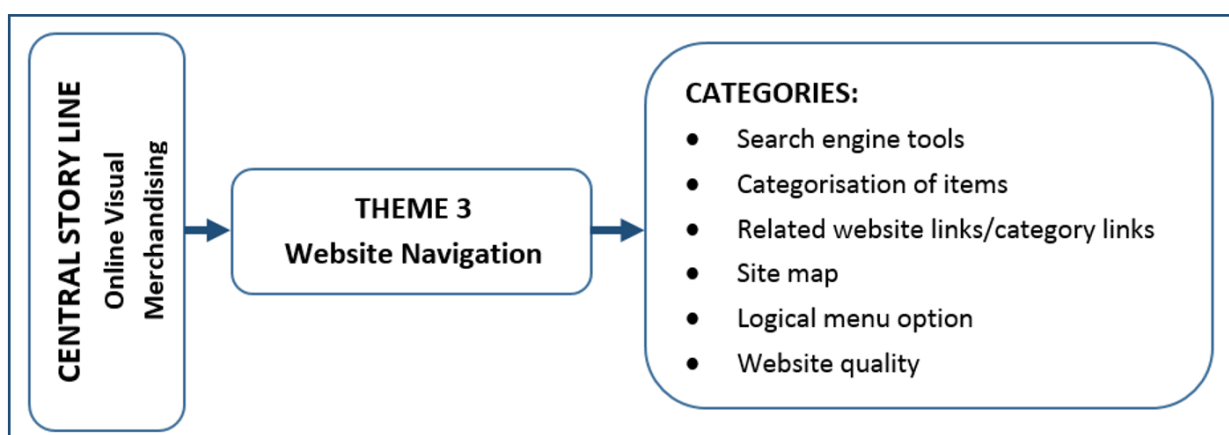
- *“...it must be easy to move through the categories and options. You don’t want to wait for something that’s loading”*
- *“...if it is difficult for you to figure out where’s the categories and how/where to go – I’ll leave if I can’t figure it out”*
- *“...otherwise it’s not user friendly and you can’t use it”*

Overall, Website Content was an important theme for participants in relation to online shopping. Participants indicated the information provided by the e-tailer should be comprehensive and complete, quality-based and detailed. Participants indicated that the information provided on the website should be of such a nature so as to not leave you with questions after you have read it.

The next theme is Website Navigation and is discussed below.

### ***Theme 3: Website Navigation***

As illustrated in Figure 5.5 below, the third theme to be discussed is Website Navigation.



**Figure 5.5: Website navigation**

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 5.5 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Website Navigation and the importance of each as identified by the participants.

**Table 5.5: Website navigation importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Search Engine Tools	Yes
2	Categorisation of Items	Yes
3	Related Website Links/Category Links	No
4	Site Map	Nice to have
5	Logical Menu Options	Yes
6	Website Quality	Yes

Source: Author's own compilation

The important categories related to Website Navigation for participants included the search engine tool, the categorisation of items, logical menu options and website quality (see Table 5.5).

- **Category 1, 2, 5 and 6: Search Function/ Categorisation/ Logical Menu Options/ Website Quality**

Participants indicated that the search function was critical and that it serves to make the online shopping process a lot faster. In terms of categorisation and logical menu options, the participants indicated that these functions serve to make finding items/products on a site easier, but they highlighted the importance of using clear and well-known categories and labels or terms. This again underscores the sentiment

expressed by participants to have a standardised layout on the website. With regards to website quality, the participants stressed the importance of having a website that works well in terms of loading images and download speed.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1, 2, 5 and 6:

- *“...yes would leave a website easily if there is no search tool”*
- *“...it makes everything quicker so it is important”*
- *“...if the categorisation isn’t clear or if it’s complicated I will leave a website”*
- *“...but this is very important to also have sub-themes. So if you have shoes, fine but then underneath that you will have pumps”*
- *“...I like it when they have a sale category in the categories”*
- *“...logical menu options are important”*
- *“...it makes it easy to find things on your site”*
- *“...they mustn’t use different terms and labels for things. I think it’s like to try and be different but it’s just stick to the basics”*
- *“...obviously the downloading speed should be quick. If I’m buying clothes and the clothing image is not loading, I will definitely not purchase and leave”;*
- *“...that comes back to the whole time thing – if it takes too long to load and then you might as well just go to a store”*

#### • **Category 4: Site Map**

With regards to site maps, participants indicated that it is merely a ‘nice to have’ theme, with the majority of participants indicating that they rarely use the function whilst shopping online.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 4:

- *“...I don’t think a site map is something that will make me purchase, it’s a nice to have”*
- *“...I’ve never used it before, so it can’t be that important”*

- *“...a site map is important at the top if you click on something and you want to go back to the thing that you were at previously”*

- **Category 3: Website-related links**

Finally, participants indicated that they do not feel that website-related links are an important theme for online shopping. The participants primarily indicated that they do not like the use of website-related links and that they can be intrusive and irritating during the online shopping process.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 3:

- *“...no I wouldn't like links to related products”*
- *“...I think it can be intrusive, if there are links they must be subtle”*
- *“...if I have too many links to this, and links to that, then I want to get back to my previous search then it's difficult for me to get back to the other link then I immediately leave the search engine”*

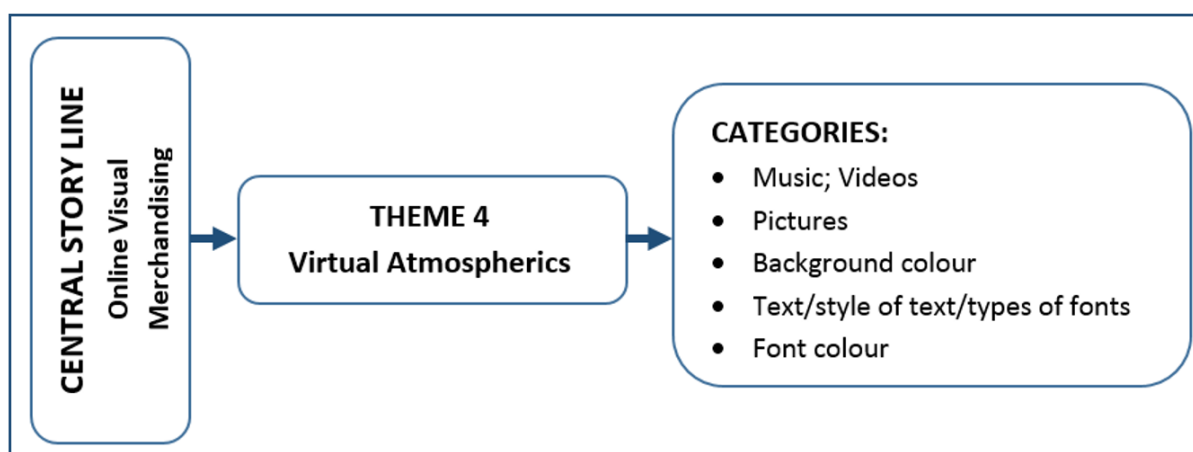
Overall, Website Navigation was identified as an important theme for participants. Good website navigation was predominantly associated with the factor of convenience, with better website navigation ensuring that participants can quickly and easily find what they are looking for and minimise the time that they have to invest in shopping online. The lack of effective and easy Website Navigation was definitively identified as a factor which would cause participants not to shop from a particular website or e-tailer.

The next theme is Virtual Atmospherics and is discussed below.

#### ***Theme 4: Virtual Atmospherics***

The fourth theme, as shown in both Figure 5.2 and 5.6, is Virtual Atmospherics and is discussed below.





**Figure 5.6: Theme 4: Virtual atmospherics**

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 5.6 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Virtual Atmospherics, and the importance of each as identified by the participants.

**Table 5.6: Virtual atmospherics importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Music	No
2	Videos	No
3	Pictures	Yes
4	Background Colour	Yes
5	Text/Style of Text/Types of Fonts	Yes
6	Font Colour	Yes

Source: Author's own compilation

The important categories identified by the participants with regards to Virtual Atmospherics include the use of pictures, the background colour used on the website, the text/font style and the font colour. Interestingly, the participants viewed the use of videos and music on a website as unimportant (see Table 5.6).

- **Categories 3, 4, 5 and 6: Pictures/Background Colour/ Font Style/Font Colour**

The participants highlighted the importance of having a neutral background which allows for the products to stand out. In line with this, the participants expressed the overall sentiment that the different themes, such as the background colour, font style and font colour should be simple and should complement one another to ensure that

the products/information on the site is easily readable, and that the various themes are not distracting. Furthermore, the participants also highlighted the importance of the role which various background colours and fonts may play in promoting the specific brand image on a site.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 3, 4, 5 and 6:

- *“...pictures are very important”*
- *“...yes, you want to see all the angles and it must be of good quality”*
- *“...when you search the product it has to be white background so that you can see the product”*
- *“...it must be like a neutral colour. I don't like to be overstimulated when I go onto a website”*
- *“...it should be plain and easy on the eyes”*
- *“...the font would bother me if it's hectic cursive and I can't make out what it is”*
- *“...make it as easy and readable as possible”*
- *“...it must match or complement the background colour”*
- *“...if I really can't make out what you're saying I might not purchase”*
- *“...I think it adds up to what we were saying about the brand image”*
- *“...it must reflect the brand image”*

#### • **Category 1 and 2: Videos/Music**

With regard to the use of music or videos on a site, the participants indicated that they do not want these themes to be included on a site and that it will not necessarily influence their purchasing online. The participants further indicated that if themes such as videos are included on a website, that they must be optional to the consumer.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1 and 2:

- *“...people shop at work, they don't want music”*
- *“...I hate it – don't ever put it there. It's not important”*
- *“...it's too distracting and it's not going to make any difference”*
- *“...videos are not necessary, it for clothing”*

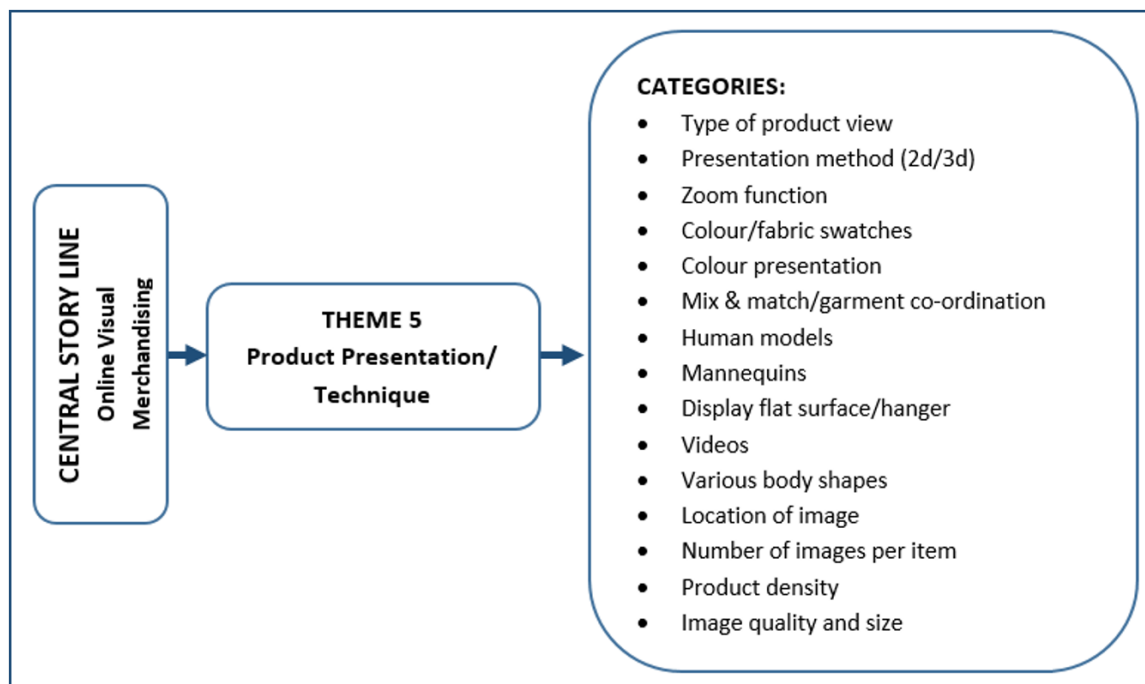
- "...videos irritate me, especially auto-play videos. I don't have time to really look at videos. If they do use a video to show like products in different sizes, maybe, but I will just usually then skip it"
- "...as long as the video doesn't play automatically"
- "...you need to click. It should be an option on the video if you want to see it"
- "...it's not really going to influence whether I buy or not"

Overall, the participants indicated that Virtual Atmosphericity was a theme which could subconsciously influence them in terms of online shopping, with it having a negative influence only when it is distracting, unclear or over-stimulating. The participants shared the sentiment that the use of more simplistic, neutral colours, which serve to emphasise the products/or items on display, and readable, standard text which complements the background used on the site, were more desirable.

The next theme is Product Presentation/Technique and is discussed below.

### **Theme 5: Product Presentation/Technique**

Figure 5.7 below illustrates theme 5, Product Presentation/Technique, as derived from Figure 5.2.



**Figure 5.7: Theme 5: Product Presentation/ Technique**

Source: Author's own compilation

The fifth theme as illustrated in Figure 5.7 above is Product Presentation/Technique.

Table 5.7 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Product Presentation/Technique, and the importance of each as identified by participants.

**Table 5.7: Product presentation/technique importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Type of Product View	Yes
2	Presentation Method (2D/3D)	Yes
3	Zoom Function	Yes
4	Colour/Fabric Swatches	Nice to have
5	Colour Presentation	Yes
6	Mix-and-Match/Garment Coordination	Nice to have
7	Human Models	Yes
8	Mannequins	No
9	Display Flat Surface/Hanger	No
10	Videos	Nice to have
11	Various Body Shapes	Yes
12	Location of Image	No
13	Number of Images per Item	Yes
14	Product Density	Yes
15	Image Quality and Size	Yes

Source: Author's own compilation

In terms of Product Presentation/Techniques, the participants highlighted the product view, presentation method (2D/3D), the zoom function, colour presentation, the use of various body shapes, the number of images per item, product density and image quality and size as important categories (see Table 5.7).

- **Category 1 and 2: Product Views/Presentation Method (2D/3D)**

In terms of the product views, the participants indicated that they prefer to have the basic views of a product which includes a front, back and side view, at the very least. Furthermore, the participants indicated that they would prefer the availability of a 3D image, as opposed to a 2D image, or a combination of the two. Alternatively, the

participants also indicated that a 360°view with the ability to manipulate the product and turn it would be ideal.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1 and 2:

- *“...a front view, a back view and a side view. That’s basic views”*
- *“...if these views aren’t there it is going to make you not to purchase”*
- *“...at least if they have the ability to make a website, they have ability to give me three D”*
- *“...it must be three D – you must be able to see how it fits on a person and the three D helps with that”*
- *“...sometimes the initial search will show you the two D pictures and once you click on the two D, it will give you a three D. So it’s first your two D, it has to somehow catch your eye, okay, that is a nice dress, then you click on it and it will give you a three D picture”*
- *“...so actually, for me, it’s then both”*
- *“...so for me, maybe two D and three D”*
- *“...if there’s enough two D views of the product from different angles I don’t mind”*
- *“...I want to be able to click on it and drag it around like a three-sixty view”*

### • **Category 3: Zoom Function**

In terms of the zoom function, in relation to the presentation of products, the participants indicated that it was a critical function as it allows the consumer to identify the product details such as the material or finishing used on the product.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 3:

- *“...absolutely – The zoom function is very important to see the details like say embroidery that type of thing”*
- *“...sometimes it makes you see the material when you zoom you can see the type of fabric, it’s better”*
- *“...if you zoom in you can see there’s, oh, there’s ribbing there”*

- *“...the zooming function is something critical that will influence your purchasing, on the specific product”*

- **Category 5: Colour Presentation**

With regards to colour presentation, the participants were asked to indicate whether they would prefer to see a block with the product colour, or whether they would prefer to view the colour of the product on a model. The majority of participants indicated that they would prefer to see the colour of the product on a model, or have a combination of the two presentation methods where it still allows the consumer to ultimately see the colour displayed on the entire model.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 5:

- *“...so, that’s quite important for me and there a block will just not suffice. For me it’s better if the colour changes on the model”*
- *“...various colour options is important for the same type of item. You don’t want to see the same shirt listed five times in every colour. You just want to see it as a whole and be able to click the different colours”*
- *“...to see the different colours available that’s important – as long as it still will give you a picture of the dress”*

- **Category 11: Various Body Shapes**

A key theme that was identified by participants and which they stated would influence their online purchasing decisions, was the use and availability of various body shapes to display products. The participants indicated that the use of various body shapes and models which are more realistic or relatable would increase their likelihood of purchasing online.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 11:

- *“...you know what – you get apple shapes and this shapes and pear shapes and I don’t know, goodness, but on websites you only get a an iron board shape”*
- *“...if they show you how it would look on each body shape – that would be awesome”*

- *“...if the models are more...are curvy women. It’s also relatable if it’s a normal person rather than Victoria’s Secret model”*
- *“...I don’t buy their clothing, because they- use tiny models – I’m not tiny”*
- *“...you don’t know if it’s short, it’s going be short on me”*
- *“...maybe if you selected a specific size, and that model is your size”*
- *“...if there was a website that provided that, I would buy from that website rather than from another that doesn’t”*

- **Categories 12, 13, 14 and 15: Number of images/ Quality and Size /Product Density/ Location**

In terms of the images themselves which are used to display products, in relation to the number of images, the location of the images, the density and the quality and size of the images, the participants indicated that they prefer at least three images per product, and that the images must be of high quality and not too small. The participants further indicated that the location of the images did not really bother them but that they should be visible and should not obstruct other themes on the website. With regards to the density of the products being displayed, the participants once again highlighted that they prefer a simple and neat layout which does not appear too cluttered.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 12, 13, 14 and 15:

- *“...at least three, I would say on one product”*
- *“...it just needs to be consistent. So if you give me four views of a dress, I always want four views of dress – because sometimes you can see this dress now from every angle and then if you go to another dress and they only have the front view, or only a side view”*
- *“...I think as long as there’s an image of every view”*
- *“...there must be at least a picture for each of the views”*
- *“...images must not be too small”*
- *“...it can be a small picture but if you hover over it, it must enlarge and it must be high quality”*
- *“...I like how that having the smaller images on the site and that you click on one and you get the enlarged”*

- *“...if they can’t even get a proper picture for the website – what’s the quality of the clothes going to be like”*
- *“...as long as you can see the image, if it pops up on the right, left corner and it’s half out of my screen, yes it will upset me. Other than that, if I can actually view it I don’t mind where it pops up”*
- *“...if you can click on it, and that quickly opens, you have a look and it and doesn’t take the whole page”*
- *“...I don’t think it bothers me – it won’t change my purchase decision, but I actually prefer it in the middle. Because that’s what you’re looking at, but not that that would change my mind”*
- *“...yes density is important because otherwise it’s going to be cluttered and too busy”*
- *“...it might influence your shopping-overall shopping experience and how much you end up shopping”*
- *“...I think it just needs to be a balance”*
- *“...as long as it doesn’t look too cluttered and the pictures look neat”*

The availability of fabric swatches, a garment coordination function and videos to display products were viewed as ‘nice to have’ themes by participants (See Table 5.7).

#### • **Category 4: Fabric swatches**

In terms of fabric swatches, the participants again expressed the notion that they would rather prefer to see the colour on the entire model, as opposed to just on a fabric swatch block.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 4:

- *“...I think that fabric swatches would be a nice to have”*
- *“...it’s nice to have on, on one item that you can go click ‘blokkies’ to see the colours”*
- *“...as long as I can see the dress in full colour”*
- *“...it’s no use seeing a little swatch and I can’t see it on the dress”*
- *“...what I do like about it, sometimes when you’re on a white dress it will have little block saying it’s pink, blue, purple, then you know”*
- *“...I won’t say that will affect my purchase, but it is a nice to have”*



- **Category 6: Garment coordination**

The participants felt that a garment coordination function could assist the consumer in seeing how different items will look together and would also help the consumer with new ideas. The participants, however, felt that they would like to have the option of this function rather than it being forced on them, and that the function overall would be a 'nice to have' which would depend on the need of the consumer which may differ from person to person.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 6:

- *"...it is a nice to have. I wouldn't not buy because they don't give you but it does give you an idea of how you could wear it or what you could pair it with the product should complement each other"*
- *"...if they're going to suggest something, it must, I feel like it should match"*
- *"...it depends – I don't want to see other stuff, I know what I want. So if I want to buy a shirt, I want to buy a shirt and if I want to buy a suit, I'll buy a suit. I think it's just the way of shopping for different individuals"*
- *"...I always feel if they match it with something else, they're just trying to sell me more stuff"*
- *"...I think it depends on your mood – depends if you just want to play around or if you're in a hurry to buy"*
- *"...they must not necessarily put it in your face – it should be a function you can choose. So you can decide, you can choose to go with the thing or not"*
- *"...yes, basically the ones that want to use that function can use it"*

- **Category 10: Videos**

In terms of the use of videos to display products, the participants indicated that it would be a 'nice to have' theme. Similar to the use of videos with regard to Virtual Atmospherics, the participants indicated that videos should be optional. In addition, the participants also linked the use of videos with the type of product the consumers were shopping for, with participants sharing the sentiment that more expensive

products may require the use of videos or be linked with the expectation of a video as a means to display the product.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 10:

- *“...again, a nice to have. A nice to have but optional”*
- *“...I think it depends on the website. If you are high-end, I will expect you to maybe give that as an option”*
- *“...I think that additional feature also applies when it comes to expensive purchases. If it's something cheap you can get away with not having videos”*
- *“...I don't have enough money to watch videos”*

- **Categories 7, 8 and 9: Human models/mannequins/ Flat surfaces/ Hanger**

In relation to the various means of displaying products or items, the participants indicated that they prefer the use of human models over mannequins, flat surfaces or a hanger view. The participants indicated that human models are more realistic and give a better indication of how the product will look and wear. The participants did, however, indicate that the type of models used should be taken into account, similar to the considerations associated with the inclusion of various body types, as discussed earlier.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 7, 8 and 9:

- *“...it should be human models otherwise you don't know how it's going look”*
- *“...models in the sense of just a person wearing the clothes – not a supermodel. It must be realistic”*
- *“...mannequins – I just sometimes feel it's a bit unrealistic and impersonal”*

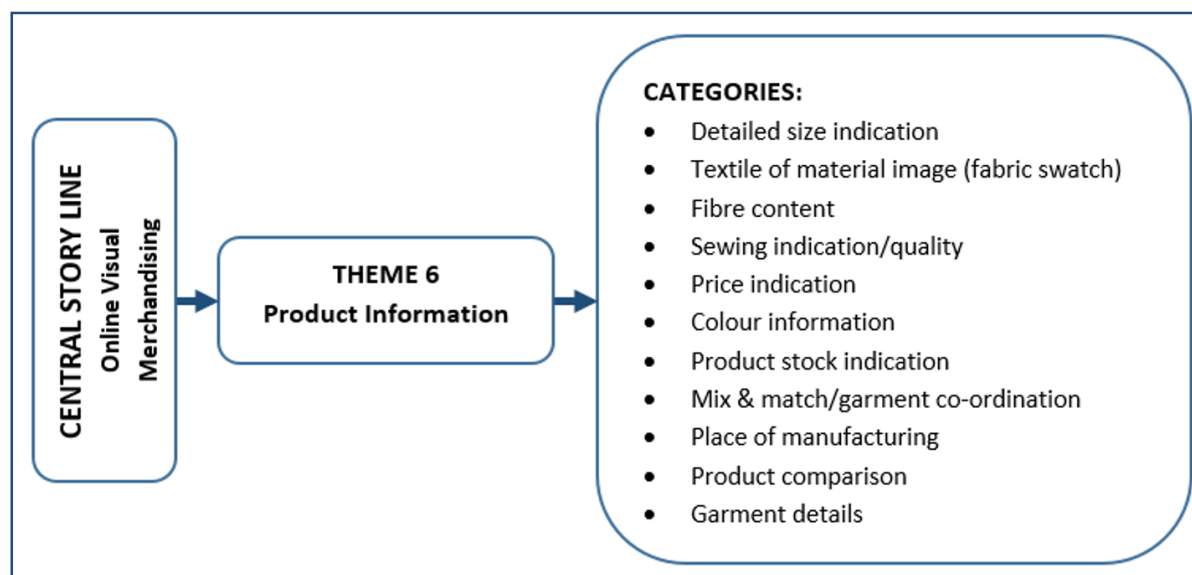
Overall, the participants indicated that Product Presentation/ Technique was an important theme which would impact on their online purchasing decisions. The participants highlighted the importance of having the basic product views, the use of a 3D method of presentation, and the critical importance of the zoom function.

Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of using various body shapes to display products along with the use of human models. In this regard, the participants emphasised the use of relatable ‘normal’ models, as opposed to supermodels. Finally, when questioned, the participants indicated that this theme should rather be denoted as ‘Product Presentation’, as opposed to ‘Product Presentation/Technique’.

The next theme is Product Information and is discussed below.

### ***Theme 6: Product Information***

The next theme that was discussed was Product Information, as illustrated in Figure 5.8.



**Figure 5.8: Theme 6: Product information**

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 5.8 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Product Information, and the importance of each as identified by the participants.

**Table 5.8: Product information importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Detailed Size Indication	Yes
2	Textile or Material Image (Fabric Swatch)	Nice to have
3	Fibre Content	Nice to have
4	Sewing Indication/Quality	Nice to have
5	Price Indication	Yes
6	Colour Information	Yes
7	Product Stock Indication	Yes
8	Mix-and-Match/Garment Coordination	Nice to have
9	Place of Manufacturing	Nice to have
10	Product Comparison	Nice to have
11	Garment Details	Nice to have

Source: Author's own compilation

Detailed size indication, price indication, colour information and product stock information were the categories identified as important by the participants in relation to Product Information (see Table 5.8).

- **Category 1: Detailed Size Indication**

The participants indicated that the provision of detailed size information for products was of critical importance. They indicated that the lack of a detailed size indication would definitely impact negatively on whether they would purchase an item, considering the fact that one of the detriments of online shopping is the inability to fit an item before purchasing.

Furthermore, the participants indicated that a size chart should be detailed and provide the measurements in terms of the different measurements in centimetres, along with an indication of the sizes from the different countries (for example, UK or US). The impact of the brand was also mentioned by participants, with some participants noting that a detailed size indication was less of a necessity with well-known brands or with well-known products.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 1:

- *“...if it's the first time that you're buying on that website and you're not sure of the sizes and you really want something on there – I would look at the chart”*
- *“...extremely important yes. And must have all – all the centimetres, all countries, all everything so that you can see the UK is this”*
- *“...proper size indication where you can actually go and measure your bust”*
- *“...it's important because that's what prevents me from purchasing”*
- *“...also the model size like the waist – that would be good to know, like if you know the centimetres on the model then you can compare to yourself”*
- *“...I think again it will depend on the product and the brand – if you are familiar with the brand, it doesn't matter. If it is a dress that I don't buy often, then I would need a size guide to figure out my size”*

- **Categories 5, 6 and 7: Price Indication/Colour Information/ Stock Indication**

Price indication, colour information and stock indication on a website were highlighted by all the participants as very important themes which would influence them to not purchase online if they were not available on the website. The participants further indicated that they want accurate pricing if prices vary according to size. In addition, the participants indicated that they prefer to see a picture of the colour display, but that an accurate description of the colour is also important.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 5, 6 and 7:

- *“...if you want to change the price per size, show all the available prices at once – don't hide the price”*
- *“...prefer a picture. Just a little – like with the swatches”*
- *“...I prefer a picture and writing but the picture is the most important one”*
- *“...I prefer both. I want to see it on someone and I want see the name of the colour – a 'blokkie' with the colour, everything”*

- *“...it shouldn’t just say ‘blue’, it should be pale blue – it must be the right colour”*
- *“...I don’t want to click on a thing and then eventually when you go checkout, then put all your information in, and then ‘oh no’, ‘sorry’, we don’t have stock”*
- *“...what is nice of some websites is that they give you their sizes available, and the ones that’s not available has already got a line through”*
- *“...only if it’s accurate and only if it’s unavailable”*
- *“...why list it if you don’t have stock? Don’t allow me to buy it, or see it even, if you don’t have it”*

The majority of the other themes related to Product Information, including a material image, fibre content, sewing indication, garment details, garment coordination, product comparison and place of manufacturing, were viewed as ‘nice to have’ by participants (see Table 7).

- **Categories 2, 3, 4 and 11: Material image (Fabric Swatch)/ Fibre Content/ Sewing Indication/ Garment details**

With regards to a material image, the participants indicated that it is not a necessary theme that would influence them to buy or not. In line with this, the participants indicated that the specific fibre content of the material was also not that important, but that they would simply like to know what material was used.

Furthermore, in terms of sewing content, the participants indicated that it is not important but that it could provide an additional indication of the quality of the product. This sentiment was echoed in relation to the garment details, with the participants further indicating that they would consider the garment details to a greater degree if they were buying from a website or brand which is unknown or which they have not purchased from before.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 2, 3, 4 and 11:

- *“...a material image or swatch won’t make-it, won’t break-it for me – it’s also a nice to have”*

- *“...I want to know what I’m buying, whether it’s cotton, linen. If it’s just tells me what type of material was used, I’m happy”*
- *“...I’ll be okay with a description”*
- *“...if you’ve got the zoom function then that’s not necessary, but have one or the other – it will be a nice to have”*
- *“...is it ninety percent cotton, ten percent polyester? I want to know that. Especially when it’s stretchy material”*
- *“...I would look at it, but in text. That’s fine”*
- *“...a sewing indication would be a nice to have not a necessity”*
- *“...I think especially on a website with brand that I haven’t been on, I like looking at that information. Seeing if they have it helps me make the purchase decision”*
- *“...it helps to show more quality or less quality”*
- *“...garment details – that’s a nice to have”*
- *“...it’s not a show stopper”*

In relation to the above, the participants did indicate that the sewing indication and garment details may be an important factor for certain consumers or products. Specific reference was made to men’s clothing where these technical details become important in terms of the design and style of the product:

- *“...based on product type definitely – especially for men’s’ clothes for example. You know, with blazers and jackets for instance, you get something that folds over, you get something that’s straight down, you get something with two buttons, something with three buttons – it makes a difference”*
- *“...seam is important, sorry, for men’s pants. I was going to say for men’s trousers it is important, definitely. You’ve got your style of how you wear something so you want to know if it’s turned out or not. So it makes a difference. That’s why I said, I want to see the actual information”*

- **Categories 8 and 10: Garment Coordination/ Product Comparison**

In line with the view of garment coordination in relation to product presentation, as discussed previously, the participants felt that this would be a ‘nice to have’ option. With regards to product comparison, the participants indicated that this would also

merely be a 'nice to have' option. The participants stated that product comparison is already an implicit action when shopping for products online, as the consumer goes through the comparison process automatically in the checkout cart before buying.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 8 and 10:

- *"...it's a nice to have"*
- *"...I don't think it's important. It must just be on the side so that I can choose to go there – if you're in a rush then you won't go there"*
- *"...would be nice if you have the option, and it's not pushed onto you"*
- *"...the comparison is also a nice to have, it would be a nice function"*
- *"...I think that would be great because then you can measure size, price etc. and compare"*
- *"...I almost do that already in a sense of the checkout cart – you'll put all the ones you like and then you'll be like, 'Okay, nah take it out'. So it's almost there but it will be nice to have a separate function where you can click to say compare"*

#### • **Category 9: Place of Manufacturing**

Finally, the participants indicated that information regarding the place of manufacturing of products would also be a 'nice to have', as it may provide an additional indication as to the quality of the product, and may provide a better indication of the size of the product.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 9:

- *"...that's also a nice to have to know whether it's from India or China"*
- *"...it's for your information"*
- *"...I suppose it depends on the market – a lady is not going to wear made in China. She's not going to buy a 'made in China'"*
- *"...it's good for me as well, because you get an indication of the quality"*
- *"...I'm not sure if it's a quality thing? If you've got something that's made in Italy versus something that's made in China"*



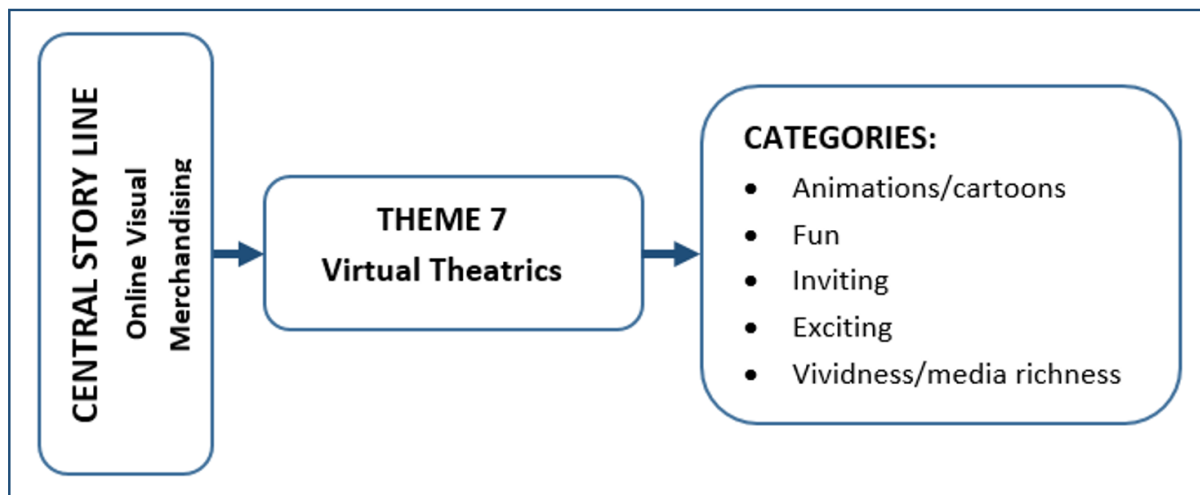
- *“...if it’s made in one place I won’t buy it, but if it’s made in the other place I would actually buy”*
- *“...it could justify the price of what you’re paying”*
- *“...As long as their measurements are accurate it does not matter – it will only influence the sizes”*
- *“...If you really want something, it doesn’t matter where it comes from”*

Overall, the participants indicated that Product Information is an important theme with regards to their online purchasing. The participants especially highlighted the importance of detailed size indications, price indications, colour information and stock indication as critical themes, which if absent, would decrease the likelihood of them purchasing online.

Essentially, these themes represent the basic information participants require/desire when purchasing online. Furthermore, the participants emphasised the importance regarding the accuracy of this information on the website as a critical factor which would influence their online shopping.

### **Theme 7: Virtual Theatrics**

Virtual Theatrics, the seventh theme, was discussed next as illustrated in Figure 5.9.



**Figure 5.9: Theme 7: Virtual theatrics**

Source: Author’s own compilation

Table 5.9 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Virtual Theatrics and the importance of each as identified by participants.

**Table 5.9: Virtual theatrics importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Animations/Cartoons	No
2	Fun	No
3	Inviting	Yes
4	Exciting	No
5	Vividness/Media Richness	No

Source: Author's own compilation

The participants indicated that the majority of categories associated with Virtual theatrics were not important, with only the fact that a website must be inviting being deemed as important (see Table 5.9).

- **Category 3: Inviting**

In terms of a website having to be inviting (linking back to the overall layout and attractiveness of the website), the participants indicated that a website should be appealing, yet straightforward, simplistic and uncluttered.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 3:

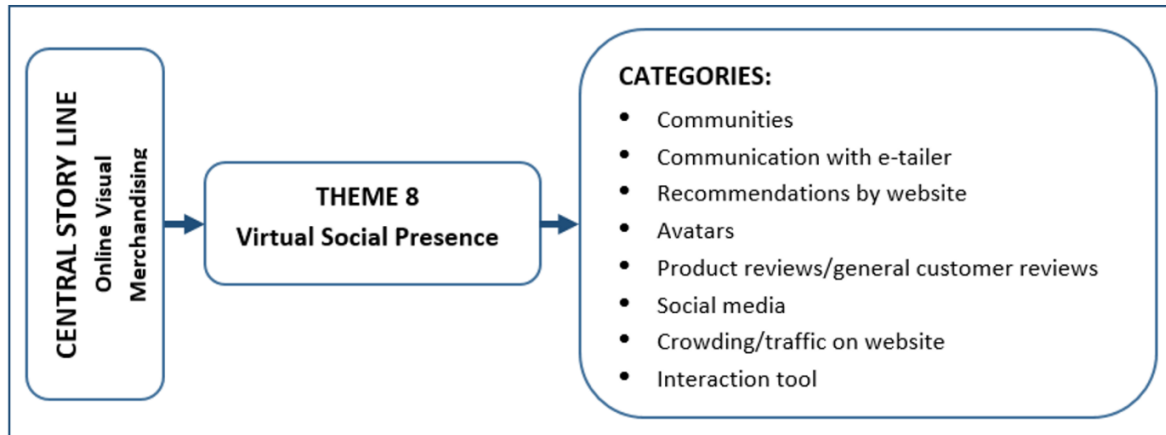
- *“...you should feel comfortable with it and wanting to be there”*
- *“...I think a website should just be, it should at least be appealing but I don't need extra frills and suddenly fireworks going across the screen – you are there for the purpose of purchasing”*
- *“...the website should just be all over straightforward”*
- *“...it should be minimalistic”*
- *“...it must be simplistic”*
- *“...it must be logical, clear, then it will be inviting. Not pop-ups and clutter”*

Overall, the participants indicated that Virtual Theatrics was not an important theme which would impact on their online purchasing. Therefore, only the category of inviting was discussed.

The next theme is Virtual Social Presence and is discussed below.

### **Theme 8: Virtual Social Presence**

The eighth theme, Virtual Social Presence, is presented in Figure 5.10.



**Figure 5.10: Theme 8: Virtual Social Presence**

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 5.10 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Virtual Social Presence, and the importance of each as identified by participants.

**Table 5.10: Virtual social presence importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Online Communities	No
2	Communication with E-tailer	Nice to have
3	Recommendations by Website	Nice to have
4	Avatars	No
5	Product Reviews/General Customer Reviews	Yes
6	Social Media	No
7	Crowding/Traffic on Website	No
8	Interaction Tool	Nice to have

Source: Author's own compilation

With regards to Virtual Social Presence, the participants found only product/general customer reviews to be an important category (see Table 5.10).

- **Category 5: Product Reviews/General Customer Reviews**

The participants indicated that reviews were important to them as they provide an indication of the quality of customer service by the company/website, the quality of the products, and the quality and trustworthiness of the brand. The participants did indicate that third-party reviews are more preferable, as reviews on the website itself may be biased.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 5:

- *“...I think mostly when I view reviews – it won’t be about a specific item, with clothing. It will be about the brand”*
- *“...usually it’s about the customer service of that specific website, it’s not about the product”*
- *“...I need to know if it’s trustworthy, are the products generally of quality”*
- *“...I also prefer going to a third party review”*
- *“...for me it increases trust when it is on a different page though. Getting a review on the website itself – I think it’s biased”*

Communication with the e-tailer, the presence of an interaction tool, as well as recommendations by the website were all deemed to be ‘nice to have’ themes by participants (see Table 5.10).

- **Categories 2, 3 and 8: Communication with E-tailer/Interaction Tool/ Recommendations**

The participants indicated that communication with the e-tailer might be important, yet communication online may not always be adequate or helpful if it is not with a real person. Furthermore, the participants noted that a consumer would only need to communicate with the e-tailer if they experience a problem, or if the information on the website is inadequate. Lastly, the participants indicated that recommendations could be nice to have, but that they should not be pushed onto the consumer and that they will not necessarily impact on whether they make a purchase or not.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 2, 3 and 8:

- *“...I think communication with the retailer yes it is important, but then you get dumb-bots and you get smart-bots – sometimes if you ask a question, you get an answer that’s not really applicable”*
- *“...if it’s a real time consultant helping you – that’ll be great”*
- *“...I will need that function for queries only. You only want that if their site is crap or if I want to complain. It comes down to if you are facing issues you want these functions”*
- *“...recommendations are a nice option to have, but only if they don’t push it on us”*
- *“...it’s nice, I would like that but it won’t determine if I purchase”*

In terms of online communities, social media, avatars and information on crowding/traffic, the participants felt that these were not important categories (see Table 5.10), and therefore these categories were not discussed.

- **Categories 1, 6 and 7: Online Communities/ Social Media/Crowding or Traffic**

The participants indicated that they do not want to chat while shopping online, and that they do not want to share products or items on their social media pages. Furthermore, the participants also indicated that they do not want to see crowding/traffic information on a website, and that they do not trust these statistics even if they are being displayed.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1, 6 and 7:

- *“...no I don’t want to communicate with other shoppers”*
- *“...I’m not there to chat, I have Facebook and Instagram and WhatsApp”*
- *“...I don’t want to share it on my socials”*
- *“...I don’t want to do it publically I would rather have a private sharing function”*
- *“...I think people would share if they’ve had a bad experience like service, bad/late delivery. It won’t necessarily be to share items”*
- *“...if I like what I see, I will follow you – but to share your stuff with other people, no”*
- *“...I like to see that they have social media pages – just makes it more credible”*
- *“...they don’t have to say there are currently ten million people on line”*

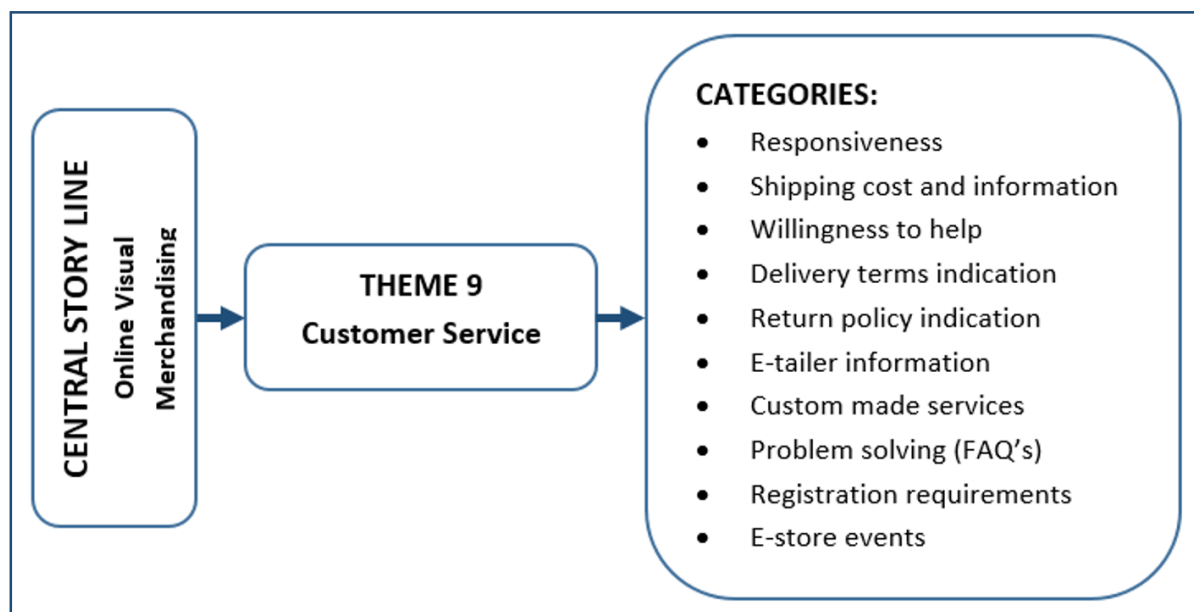
- *“...I don’t care about crowding or traffic on the website because even if they tell you they’re faking. I don’t need to see it”*

To summarise, the participants indicated that product reviews were the most important theme associated with Virtual Social Presence, as these provide somewhat of an indication into the quality of service and products provided by the brand/e-tailer. Furthermore, the participants stressed the fact that the need for contact with the e-tailer predominantly stems from situations where consumers experience problems or where insufficient information is provided on the website.

The next theme is Customer Service and is discussed below.

### **Theme 9: Customer Service**

Customer service was the ninth theme identified, and illustrated in Figures 5.2 and 5.11.



**Figure 5.11: Customer service**

Source: Author’s own compilation

Table 5.11 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Customer Service, and the importance of each as identified by participants.

**Table 5.11: Customer service importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Responsiveness	Yes
2	Shipping Cost and Information	Yes
3	Willingness to Help	Yes
4	Delivery Terms Indication	Yes
5	Return Policy Indication	Yes
6	E-tailer Information	Nice to have
7	Custom-made Services	Nice to have
8	Problem Solving (FAQ's)	Nice to have
9	Registration Requirements	Yes
10	E-Store Events	Yes

Source: Author's own compilation

With regards to Customer Service, the participants identified the categories of responsiveness, shipping cost and information, the willingness to help, delivery terms indication, registration requirements and e-store events as important (see Table 5.11).

- **Categories 1 and 3: Responsiveness/Willingness to help**

Participants indicated that the responsiveness from the e-tailer and the willingness to help were key aspects which will impact on their online shopping. Participants primarily highlighted the need for timely responses from the e-tailer.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1 and 3:

- *“...responsiveness and timely responses is very important. If they take too long to respond I won't use them again”*
- *“...it takes two seconds to take my money – they should take two seconds to respond to you”*

- **Categories 1 and 4: Shipping Cost and Information/ Delivery Terms Indication**

With regard to Shipping Cost and Information and Delivery Terms, the participants highlighted the importance of clear information and the affordability of shipping and

delivery costs. Furthermore, the participants noted the importance of delivery time as well as delivery costs, with some participants expressing the sentiment that a long delivery time or high delivery costs negate the benefits and convenience associated with online shopping.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1 and 4:

- *“...shipping cost, delivery terms and returns policy are very important. If these are not clearly discussed on the website, I will not carry on with the purchase”*
- *“...shipping and the taxes shouldn't be more than the cost of the product”*
- *“...It's not a deterrent unless it's a very, very high”*
- *“...all the information on the delivery should be very clear – the shipping cost, how long it's going to take”*
- *“...I think the delivery time as well. If I have to wait two weeks for something and I can get it in the store, today, then I'd rather go into the store”*
- *“...free delivery is a big thing for me. I'm fine if there has to be a threshold that you have to reach, but, I want free delivery”*
- *“...I still have to pay for delivery there's no benefit for me using it. So then I'd rather just go to the store again”*
- *“...I would have gotten free delivery if I just went to the store anyway, basically. The only difference is now, I don't have to drive”*

In addition, it must be noted that if given the option of paying a delivery fee or reaching a certain threshold for purchasing to receive free delivery, the majority of participants stated that they would rather buy additional items to reach the threshold and to qualify for and receive free delivery.

#### • **Category 5: Return Policy Indication**

In terms of return policy, the participants noted the importance of having clear information on the return policy in terms of the time linked to the policy and the practicalities of returning the product – whether it will be retrieved by the retailer or whether the onus of return falls on the consumer. The participants further noted that the return policy may have a direct impact on the convenience, cost and time factor



associated with online shopping and could deter them from shopping from a particular e-store/e-tailer.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 5:

- *“...return policy for me is quite important, especially with clothes, if it doesn't fit you want them to come pick it up”*
- *“...the time of the return policy is important. Yet again if I don't get thirty days maybe I might get seven days, then I might not buy from them. Also, if I'm not allowed to return items, I won't buy anything from that store”*
- *“...don't make me spend more time and money to get my-your product back to you, sort of thing”*
- *“...you're telling me convenience and it's online and delivery, but then you making me work for it if I have to return it”*
- *“...if you need to go to the Post Office I would probably then not return it. I would either just leave it there in the house or give it away”*
- *“...I don't really buy clothes from them anymore, because you have to pay for it to courier to them, which is another cost to you”*

#### • **Category 9: Registration Requirements**

With regards to registration requirements, the participants indicated that they understand the importance of registration for security purposes, but that they prefer a quicker registration process or an alternative option of a guest login, as opposed to a longer and more tedious process.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 9:

- *“...registration is quite important just for security purposes”*
- *“...I can understand you need to know who I am, where I live, because it's online you're going to deliver, and how to pay. But sometimes it's just crazy lot of information that you have to fill out”*

- *“...I think it depends on what you want. If you want a tailored experience, yes, then I’d register. But if it’s just to buy something I know I already want, please don’t ask me to register or put in a username”*
- *“...I like websites where you can have guest registration – will purchase actually more from sites, if you don’t have to register at every type of website”*
- *“...I do like the function that you can use your Facebook or your Google profile”*
- *“...I’ll go on the store I’ll select everything and have to logon or register then I’ll just won’t make the purchase”*
- *“...sometimes you go on an online shop that you don’t usually shop on, so there’s like a quick checkout rather than registering a profile, ‘because you might not return to that shop – so I like the quick checkout”*

- **Category 10: E-store events**

The participants further highlighted the importance of e-store events and sales, and indicated that these would definitely increase their likelihood of purchasing products online. In addition, the participants highlighted the importance of specific and targeted information via e-mail or SMS, but noted that if these functions are utilised, they do not want to be bombarded with notifications.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 10:

- *“...E-events online are important. Obviously, the cheaper you can get something the better”*
- *“...I want to know there’s a sale on that day - Specific information. Don’t send me generic emails”*
- *“...it would be nice to get an email, a SMS as well. Not too much though, I’m scared they will bombard me”*
- *“...I might not necessarily go on to the website to go shop, but then you get the email and then you go, you go have a look at what they’ve got”*

Further sub-themes which were designated as merely ‘nice to have’ by the participants included e-tailer information, custom-made services and the inclusion/availability of an FAQ section on the website (see Table 5.11).

- **Categories 6, 7 and 8: E-tailer Information/Custom-Made Services/ FAQs**

The participants noted that they would pay more attention to the e-tailer information and would regard it as more important, if the brand or e-tailer was less well-known and stated that the e-tailers information on the website will not necessarily make a difference in determining whether they make a purchase or not.

Furthermore, the participants indicated that the custom-made services will also be a 'nice to have, but that it will not have an effect on their purchasing. Finally, in relation to an FAQ section, the participants noted that it would be a nice section to be included on the website if certain queries arise, but that it is not always sufficient to address these queries, in which instances, direct contact and contact information of the e-tailer would be more useful and important.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 6, 7 and 8:

- *“...E-tailer information isn't a defining factor”*
- *“...it comes back to the thing if you know the brand and you know it's good quality – you don't necessarily need/read the information”*
- *“...it's a nice to have. I don't want to invest in the company, I want clothing”*
- *“...It would be nice to see there but I'm not sure how much of a difference it would make to my purchase”*
- *“...depending on the type of custom made services that they provide, it will be a nice to have”*
- *“...it's a nice to have, it's not a determining factor”*
- *“...but they must pick it up, I don't want to take it to them”*
- *“...FAQs are a nice to have, but also sometimes you got specific queries. Usually with those FAQs, let's for example say your query is not part of that, they still need to have that link that you can directly email”*

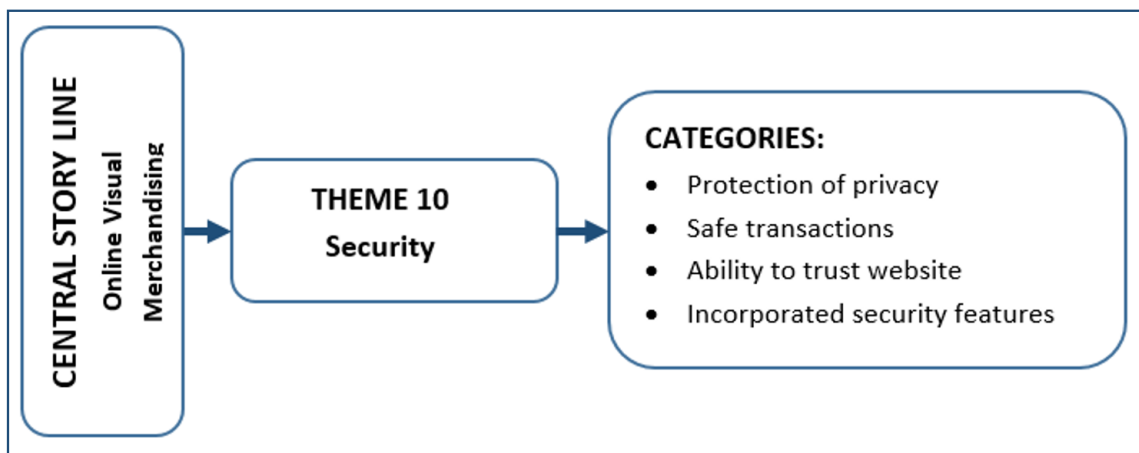
Finally, it must be noted that the participants expressed the distinct view that Customer Service becomes a greater consideration if the website/e-tailer does not provide enough and complete information, or if the consumer experiences problems with regards to the product, the cost, the delivery or with the return of the product:

- “...I just want to say that customer service comes down to people will ask things because you did not supply enough information”
- “...besides the shopping information, I think very much relates to if you have a problem. If I don’t have a problem, I don’t need to e-mail anybody to ask anything. The product is delivered and it’s done”

The next theme is Security and is discussed below.

### **Theme 10: Security**

As illustrated in Figure 5.12 below, the tenth theme identified was Security.



**Figure 5.12: Theme 10: Security**

Source: Author’s own compilation

Table 5.12 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Security and the importance of each, as identified by the participants.

**Table 5.12: Security importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Protection of Privacy	Yes
2	Safe Transactions	Yes
3	Ability to Trust Website	Yes
4	Incorporated Security Features	Yes

Source: Author’s own compilation

With regards to Security, the participants indicated that all the categories related to Security were important (see Table 5.12).

- **Categories 1, 2 and 3: Protection of Privacy/ Safe Transactions/ Ability to Trust Website**

The participants indicated that if security could not be guaranteed, or they did not feel that a website was adequately protected, they would end their session and would not purchase from that website. The participants further indicated that they will have more trust in a website if it is a credible retailer or a familiar site which they have used before.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1, 2 and 3:

- *“...if they can’t guarantee security that or if you don’t feel that it is protected, you will not carry on with your shopping”*
- *“...you will trust the website if it’s a credible retailer”*
- *“...you know well known sites and you’ve shopped from them before you feel more secure otherwise you think: I don’t know that site, is it safe?”*
- *“...so, I wouldn’t buy from websites that are not credible. So it needs to be well known sites. If it’s not credible, they need to have an EFT option. If they don’t have an EFT option I won’t give my details on there, because it’s not a site that I know of”*

- **Category 4: Incorporated Security Features**

In addition to the guarantee of security and trust that the participants require from a website, they also identified incorporated security features, such as a login and password, the option of storing details or not, different payment methods and a secure website html, as incorporated security features which would increase their trust in a website.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 4:

- *“...it relates to those login details – you feel a bit more secure if you’ve got to login to something that’s password protected so you can trust them a little bit more”*
- *“...I also want to have a choice whether I want to store my credit card details or not. I would rather not buy from you if you want to keep my credit card details”*

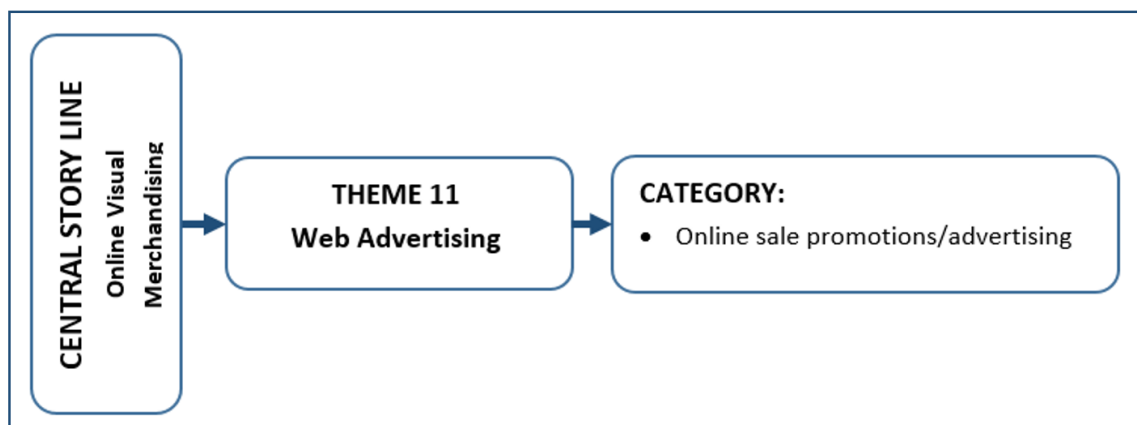
- *“...if they give you different methods of paying it adds to security”*
- *“...if they-if they use well-known payment methods”*
- *“...if it’s EFT then it takes you to a secure banking page”*
- *“...sometimes it’s just verification on the page – even if it just says MasterCard and something”*
- *“...I think if they send you a one-time password”*
- *“...that added verification of maybe a one-time password”*
- *“...in your html link, they usually have... like it goes green or has a little lock. That makes me just feel a bit more secure and if there’s that little ‘S’”*
- *“...details on the site like when it was registered, the copyright registration, for some reason I always look at it. So if it’s old, you know that they’re not maintaining this website”*

Security emerged as a key theme in determining whether the participants would purchase online from a specific website. The participants expressed the distinct view throughout the interviews that the lack of essential incorporated security features and lack of trust in a website in terms of security would be one of the main determinants for not purchasing online.

The next theme is Website Advertising and is discussed below.

### ***Theme 11: Website Advertising***

As illustrated in Figure 5.13, website advertising was identified as theme 11 and is discussed below.



**Figure 5.13: Theme 11: Web advertising**

Source: Author’s own compilation

Table 5.13 below provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Website Advertising, and the importance of each as identified by participants.

**Table 5.13: Website advertising importance of category**

CATEGORY		IMPORTANCE
1	Online Sale Promotions/Advertising	Yes

Source: Author's own compilation

The participants found Website Advertising in terms of online sale promotions and advertising to be an important category (see Table 5.13).

- **Category 1: Online Sales Promotions**

The participants indicated that sales and online promotions would definitely serve to increase their online purchasing. Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of receiving communication regarding sales in the form of e-mails or via SMS.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of category 1:

- *“...sales is definitely a factor that will make your online purchasing increase”*
- *“...if it's on the website you're going to be more likely buy it”*
- *“...online promotions – that will convince me to buy online”*
- *“...I get emails when they have an online sale, so then I normally will go and look at it”*
- *“...it's nice to get it in an email”*

In line with the above, the participants identified factors associated with promotions, such as constant pop-ups, as a deterring factor which would decrease their likelihood to buy products online:

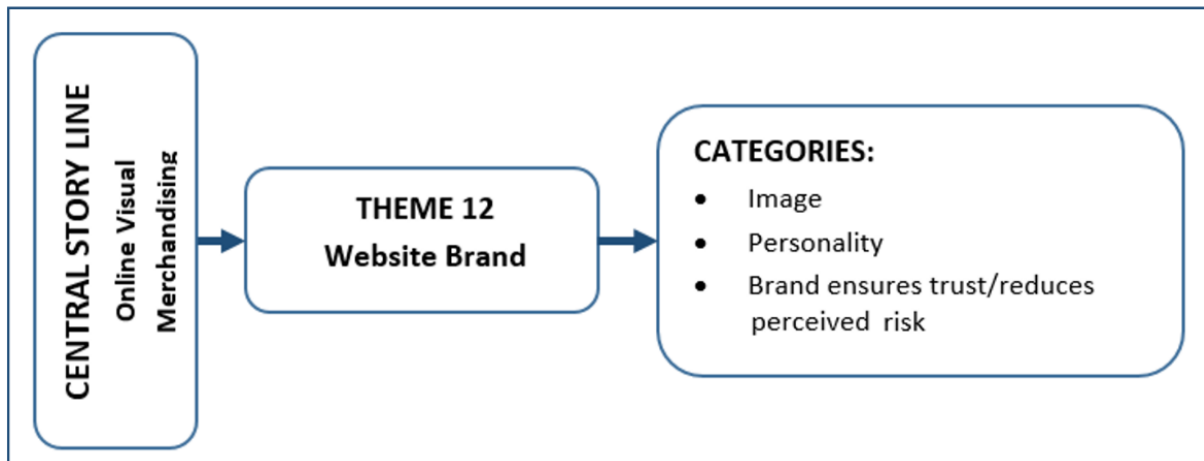
- *“...if there's a button at the navigation, saying 'sales' I'll go there if I choose, the pop-up stuff will put me off of the website”*
- *“...pop-ups the whole time that covers the rest of the content and then you can't find the close button – In general pop-ups are just irritating”*

- “...if you’re in the middle of selecting what you want and there’s a popup of ‘but we’ve got this on special as well’ – that’s not what I came here for”
- “...but if it’s se-such a good special you might put up with all of these things just because it was that cheap”
- “...it’s okay as long as it’s not in the way”

The next theme is Website Brand which is discussed below.

### **Theme 12: Website Brand**

Website Brand was the last theme identified, as illustrated in Figures 5.2 and 5.14, and discussed below.



**Figure 5.14: Website brand**

Source: Author’s own compilation

Table 5.14 below, provides a breakdown of the categories associated with Website Brand and the importance of each as identified by participants.

**Table 5.14: Website brand importance of categories**

CATEGORIES		IMPORTANCE
1	Image	Yes
2	Personality	Yes
3	Brand Ensures Trust/Reduces Perceived Risk	Yes

Source: Author’s own compilation



The participants indicated that all the categories related to Website Brand were important to them (see Table 5.14).

- **Categories 1, 2 and 3: Image/ Personality/ Brand**

In terms of the image and personality of a website, the participants stated that a poor image and overall look would dissuade them from shopping from a particular website. The participants furthermore emphasised the important role that the website brand plays in encouraging online shopping, with the brand directly impacting the trust of the consumer towards the website, as well as the impact that it has on the appeal of the website and the perception of security.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of categories 1, 2 and 3:

- *“...if the image is bad, you won’t shop from that website”*
- *“...I think the overall look. I think if it’s well designed and there are nice pictures, you generally just feel better about the website”*
- *“...it’s really everything. It’s covering security, the appeal... So, it’s basically everything together –then yes definitely you will trust them more and be more likely to purchase”*
- *“...if you know the brand well you will be more inclined to trust them – an unknown brand is risky”*
- *“...the personality of the website won’t make you purchase more but maybe to go to the site in the first place”*
- *“...if it looks good, I think you would go back. If you’ve had a bad experience or if you were irritated, you probably wouldn’t go back again”*

### **Additional themes**

In addition to the visual merchandising themes included within the provided framework, the participants were given the opportunity to discuss any additional themes which they felt could be important in influencing whether they would purchase online or not. Consequently, the participants identified packaging, after-sales service, and the option or availability of a virtual image consultant and model, as important additional factors.

- **Additional theme 1: Packaging**

In terms of packaging, the participants indicated that the packaging of the product that they receive, contributes greatly to the perception that they have of the brand or the e-tailer. If the packaging of the product does not meet the expected quality or does not depict a certain level of care on the part of the e-tailer, this will negatively affect the brand image, as well as the likelihood of participants purchasing from that specific website or e-tailer in the future.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of additional theme 1:

- *“...for me personally it’s a determining factor because it shows you just the respect that they have for their products as well”*
- *“...if I get an expensive thing crappy delivered to me, I would have issues”*
- *“...it depends on your pricing that you paid for it. I would say yes, packaging makes a big difference”*
- *“...if it’s not nicely packed and it just looks terrible, then I’m just put off”*
- *“...I think the online experience needs to mirror the package that you get, that lands at your door”*
- *“...if it’s packed so nicely, you get a little handwritten note to say thank you for e.g. – it just, it adds to the whole experience”*
- *“...I think, for example, if you buy a suit and they just stuffed it in a courier bag and it gets to you all wrinkled – that would just totally diminish your experience”*
- *“...so it’s about the complete service”*

- **Additional theme 2: After-sales service**

With regards to after-sales service, the participants shared the sentiment that the service they receive from the e-tailer after their purchase should be similar to the service they receive prior to their purchase. The participants indicated that they do not want the experience where the e-tailer provides a service to promote the purchase, and then feel like they are left high and dry once the purchase has been completed. Additionally, the participants also noted the importance of the availability of a tracking function and tracking information being provided by the e-tailer after their purchase.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of additional theme 2:

- *“...the offline support needs to supplement the online support as well”*
- *“...a lot of people think, okay you purchased, we’ve got your money so now you’re on your own”*
- *“...I want to keep in the loop of where my order is. – it’s now being packed, now left the building, the tracking number etc.”*
- *“...I want to know what happens between - where it is”*

- **Additional theme 3: Virtual image consultant/model**

In relation to a virtual image consultant, the participants expressed the desire to have a function where the website provides assistance in terms of suggesting, matching and compiling outfits for consumers.

The following quotes of the participants were taken from the focus group interviews to validate the findings of additional theme 3:

- *“...I think if there’s an option - you say eveningwear and they play around for you. Almost in like having an image consultant”*
- *“...I think what you guys were saying is to have that image consultant there and also to allow you to play with it by yourself”*
- *“...that could be a nice tool - maybe, if someone assist you, you say ‘Oh, I actually do look nice in pink’”*
- *“...I think it comes back to what she said, is, if you maybe, at a point where you’re on the top, you’ve now selected this top, and they give you the stuff that matches, oh this shoes actually goes with this, or this pants goes with this top, it is nice. So in that way it’s almost like a virtual image consultant”*

In line with the above, the participants also expressed the desire to be able to basically build a virtual model of themselves on the website by inputting their specific measurements and body type, and so forth, to get a clearer picture of how products and items will fit and suit them:

- *“...you put in your measurements and they create a model. So basically to create yourself on the website and then you can actually see how you would look – this is how this dress might fit me”*
- *“...almost like a dress your own little lady function – That will be amazing”*
- *“...I would want to see a website that ever does that”*
- *“...if you have the option there to select your top and your bottom and maybe shoes and a handbag, and then say I’m a thirty-eight so I want to see a thirty-eight doll and I put clothes on for her, amazing. That’s next level”*

Additional theme 3 seems to be closely related to the garment coordination features which were discussed as part of the Product Presentation and Product Information themes previously discussed. The virtual image consultant and virtual model functions, in essence, represent a more sophisticated representation and design of this feature.

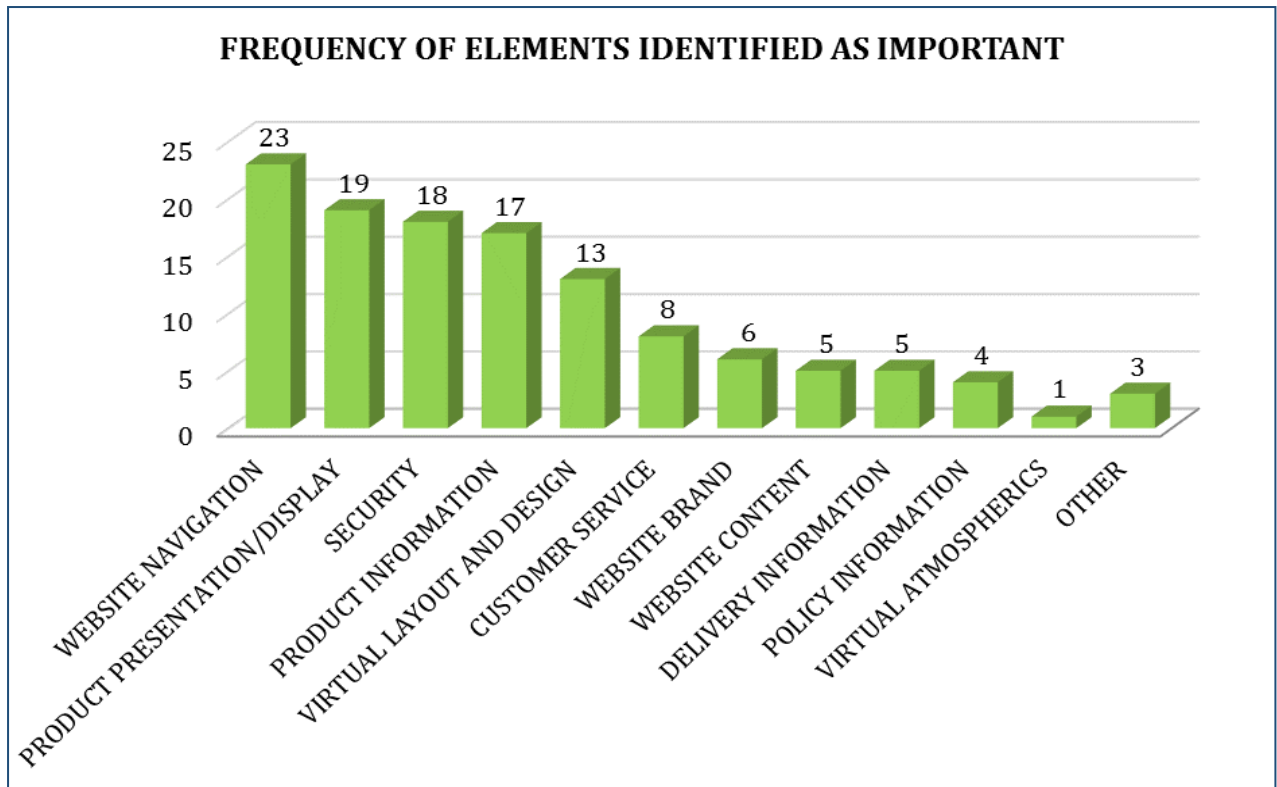
The findings obtained from the short survey questionnaire are discussed in the section below.

#### **5.5.3.2 Findings: Short survey questionnaire**

The second data-collection activity was the short survey questionnaire. The participants were required to identify the five most important online visual merchandising themes (obtained from the online visual merchandising themes list, see Appendix E), which in their opinion, would increase online purchasing.

The five most important themes were asked for, as it is an acceptable number to point out the importance, when a number of themes exist, and it is also easier to analyse. Furthermore, the participants had the opportunity to identify and elaborate on any additional online visual merchandising themes which had not been discussed in the focus group interview, which in their opinion, would increase online purchasing. (Refer to Appendix F for the short survey questionnaire.)

Figure 5.15 below provides a breakdown of the frequencies of the most important themes identified by the participants.



**Figure 5.15: Frequency of visual merchandising themes identified as important**

Source: Author's own compilation

The most important themes identified by the participants included Website Navigation, Product Presentation/Display, Security, Product Information and Virtual Layout and Design (see Figure 5.3). These important themes are discussed below and justified by quotations derived from the short survey questionnaire.

- **Website navigation:**

The theme website navigation included various categories such as search engine tool, the categorisation of items, logical menu options and website quality. All these categories were identified as being important to the participants.

- *"...if a website is difficult to use, items difficult to find – I would rather use a different site"*
- *"...ease of navigation to get to the product to be purchased"*
- *"...I need to be able to easily find what I'm looking for and it should be convenient"*
- *"...categorisation & follow-on tabs which are easy to navigate. Go back to previous page without going back to where you started"*
- *"...search functionality availability on the website"*

- *“...simplistic, clear, clean, easily navigable. No scrolling unnecessarily”*

- **Product Presentation/ Display:**

The participants identified Product Presentation/ Techniques as an important theme, and the categories included the product view, presentation method (2D/3D), the zoom function, colour presentation, the use of various body shapes, the number of images per item, product density and image quality and size.

- *“...if it is not displayed nicely or if I can't see it well I would most likely not purchase”*
- *“...I should be able to clearly see the product and how it sits on someone”*
- *“...if it is not displayed nicely or if I can't see it well I would most likely not purchase”*
- *“...images of products trump description - if I can see the shape of dress, cut, fabric etc. I would be more likely to purchase”*
- *“...it should show different views of the product. It should also clearly indicate the different sizes of the product and if they have it in stock”*

- **Security:**

The theme security included the protection of one's privacy, the ability to do safe transactions, and to trust the website. The participants indicated that security, including all the categories related to security, was deemed as a very important theme.

- *“...risk of card details getting/being stolen is not worth the purchase therefore security is essential. Credibility is important”*
- *“...I need to be ensured that my credit card information is safe. Usually reluctant to provide such info due to fraud”*
- *“...I will only shop online if I see the 'https' web address and the type of payment options available”*
- *“...the website should protect my info, especially my credit card details. My info should only be used for my shopping purpose and nothing else”*
- *“...knowing that my information is safe and that I have a choice in what information gets stored by the site, for example Shipping addresses can be stored but I don't like my credit card details being shared”*

- **Product information:**

The categories of the theme Product Information that were identified as being very important according to the participants, included detailed size indication, price indication, colour information and product stock information.

- *“...price, sizes, product details & views very important and availability also very important”*
- *“...information on the product should be complete and I want to be able to see the product clearly from different angles on the site”*
- *“...the description backs up the image. If I know what material, actual colour in terms of shade of pink then more likely to purchase with detail”*
- *“...since you cannot physically touch the products, it’s extremely important to see images (all views) and product info”*

- **Virtual layout and design:**

Virtual layout and design was identified by the participants as an important theme and included web-site structure and layout, navigation and website design, visual appeal, website geometric and the overall functionality of the website.

- *“...by having a good layout that is practical and easy to follow – It helps the shopping experience. It enables you to search for a product easier”*
- *“...when it is easy to find information/what I am looking for, it will increase my trust in the brand”*
- *“...if website is easy to navigate and layout is clear”*
- *“...it should be easy on the eyes and I should be able to quickly scan the website and find what I am looking for”*

Visual merchandising themes that emerged to a lesser degree, included Website Brand, Website Content, Delivery Information, Policy Information, and Virtual Atmospherics (refer to Figure 5.15), as justified by the quotations:

- *“...being able to contact the retailer is important. If information is not available or if the response time is long, I am reluctant to purchase”*
- *“...if I struggle to purchase a product online, I usually send an e-mail/ask for assistance. If I don’t get a response I might not go back on that site”*

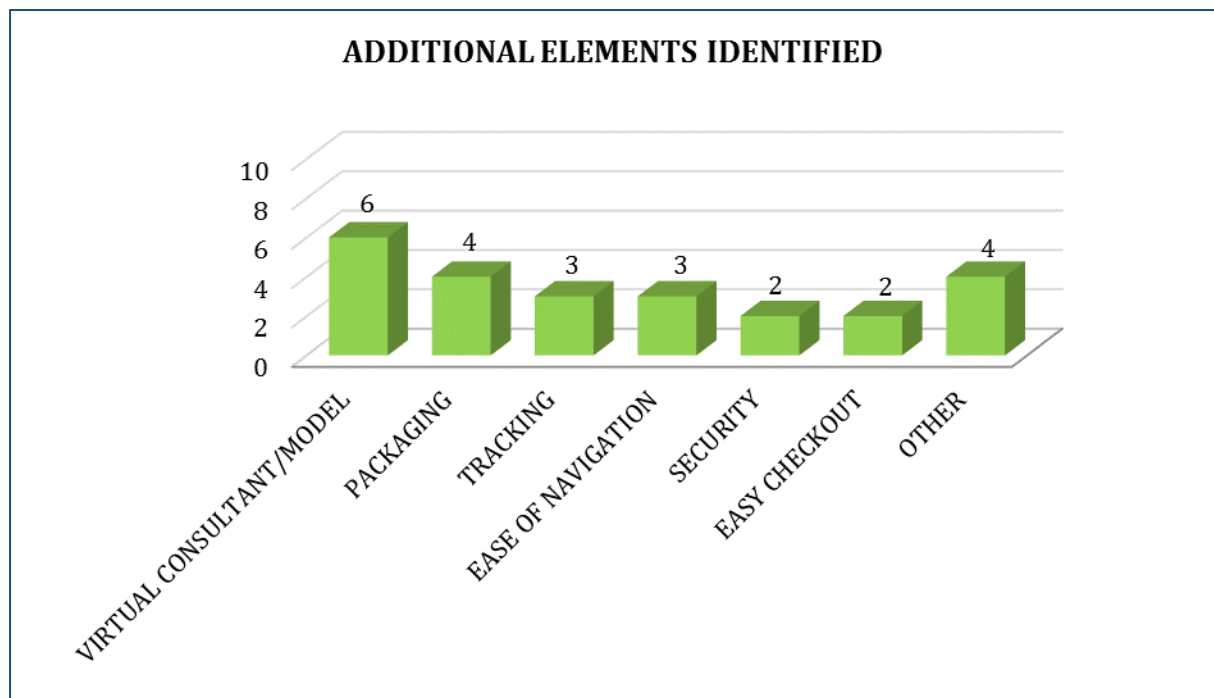
- *“...the brand should be credible. This already reduces the fear that there will be security issues of payment”*
- *“...It’s easier to buy from a brand I know and trust”*
- *“...if it is a well-known brand/site it will definitely increase my likelihood to purchase”*
- *“...knowing support service content details, knowing about site/management etc. makes me more comfortable - it’s about making an informed decision”*
- *“...clear info regarding delivery of the product and return policy”*
- *“...how long it will take, delivery cost etc. If too expensive or if it takes too long, I will not buy”*
- *“...if it is a new retailer/site I'm not familiar with, I'd like to see detailed information on the return policy, delivery info, contact details etc. FAQ section would be great”*

Any other themes identified by the participants were grouped together, as the participants did not specifically indicate what the theme was which they were referring to (see Figure 5.15). This category contained statements that focused on the availability of a wider range of maternity options, parcel tracking and the use of a fast courier, as well as the availability of a quick-scroll function.

In addition to identifying the five most important visual merchandising themes, the participants were also given the opportunity to identify any additional themes which could increase their likelihood of purchasing online.

Figure 5.16 below, provides a breakdown of the additional themes identified by the participants.





**Figure 5.16: Additional themes identified**

Source: Author's own compilation

The main additional theme which emerged, was the availability of a virtual image consultant/model function, similar to the additional theme which emerged during the focus group discussions.

The following quotations were taken from the short survey questionnaire to justify the finding:

- **Virtual Image consultant:**
  - *"...in future will be great to have an image consultant to help with choosing outfits"*
  - *"...virtual shopping assistance on my own body"*
  - *"...in the future if you can have your own measurement profile with size suggestions that will suit you"*
  - *"...to add a function that you can see how the clothes will look on the same body type as yourself"*

Furthermore, in line with the focus group discussions, packaging, as well as tracking of purchases and products emerged as further additional themes identified by the participants.

The following quotations were taken from the short survey questionnaire to justify the findings:

- **Packaging:**

- *“...should be in a box preferably to 'protect' the product”*
- *“...when the package arrives it needs to look good and reflect the brand”*
- *“...is it nicely packaged?”*

- **Tracking:**

- *“...the ability for real time tracking and service failure recovery”*
- *“...transaction tracking at checkout, once you hit the purchase button it must be clear that the transaction is busy being processed or if the Internet went down what happened to the transaction”*
- *“...visual display of parcel; like a GPS system where you can trace and track visually”*

Additional themes identified by the participants and which emerged to a lesser degree, included ease of navigation, security, and a quick and easy checkout (see Figure 5.4).

The following quotations were taken from the short survey questionnaire to justify the findings:

- **Ease of Navigation:**

- *“...go into as much detail/categories as possible. Not going to waste time deciding over items I can't afford in any way (Filter- price low to high)”*
- *“...a user-friendly website is important”*

- **Security:**

- *“...taking accountability and providing additional assurance in terms of security (lock/sign verification)”*
- *“...one-time-pin for security. Not saving credit card details unless requested”*

- **Easy checkout:**

- *“...easy checkout”*

- *“...I don’t want to jump through hoops to pay you. Make it easy for me to pay you”*

Finally, ‘other’ additional themes highlighted by the participants included the provision of gifting ideas, an after-sales service, as well as more options, and a focus on pregnant women.

The following quotations were taken from the short survey questionnaire to justify the finding:

- *“...providing gifting ideas for buyers i.e. purchasing a dress as gift for wedding anniversaries etc.”*
- *“...after-sale service – is the retailer living up to the promises after money is paid?”*
- *“...more plus size image for busty pregnant people”*

To summarise the findings obtained from the short survey questionnaire, the five most important themes identified by the participants included Website Navigation, Product Presentation/Display, Security, Product Information and Virtual Layout and Design.

The main additional theme that the participants indicated that they would like to have on an e-store was the availability of a virtual image consultant/model function, similar to the additional theme which emerged during the focus group discussions.

Furthermore, in line with the focus group discussions, packaging, as well as tracking of purchases and products, emerged as further additional themes identified by the participants.

Finally, ‘other’ additional themes highlighted by the participants included the provision of gifting ideas, an after-sales service, as well as more options, and a focus on pregnant women

The findings obtained from the card sorting activity are discussed in the section below.

### **5.5.3.3 Findings: Card sorting**

The third and final data-collection activity was card sorting (see Appendix G). In order to further assess and delineate the importance of the online visual merchandising themes (obtained from the online visual merchandising themes list, see Appendix E), which were included in the focus group discussions, the participants were required to

rank each of the themes discussed in a sequence from 1 - 'most important' to 12 - 'least important'.

Table 5.15 below provides a breakdown of the online visual merchandising themes ranked from most important to least important, according to the participants. A lower mean ranking represents a higher importance.

**Table 5.15: Ranking of visual merchandising themes in terms of importance**

THEMES	MEAN	RANK
Website Navigation	3,70	1
Virtual Layout and Design	3,78	2
Security	3,96	3
Product Presentation/Presentation Technique	3,96	4
Product Information	4,13	5
Customer Service	5,74	6
Website Content	6,35	7
Website Brand	6,74	8
Web Advertising	8,57	9
Virtual Atmospherics	9,13	10
Virtual Social Presence	10,26	11
Virtual Theatrics	11,70	12

Source: Author's own compilation

Website navigation, virtual layout and design, security, product presentation/display and product information emerged as the five most important themes (see Table 5.15).

This finding was similar to the findings for the top five online visual merchandising themes which emerged from the short survey questionnaire.

In line with the findings of the focus group interviews, the participants did not deem virtual theatrics to be an important theme, and the participants also regarded virtual social presence and virtual atmospherics as less important themes in determining their online purchasing.

#### **5.5.4 Discussion of the qualitative findings**

From the data obtained from all four the focus group sessions, including the short survey questionnaire and card sorting, it was evident that the primary reasons associated with shopping online centred on convenience and the availability of a wider range of products.

The ability to shop from the comfort of one's own home without having to physically go to the shops, coupled with the time convenience of shopping online, serves as the primary motivator for participants to engage in online shopping. In addition to this, the perception that online shopping allows for access to a greater variety and availability of products, with the ability to browse and identify the available products quickly and easily, serves as a further motivating factor for online shopping.

However, the reasons why participants do not take part in, or are hesitant to shop for apparel-related-items online refer to the inconsistencies in the size descriptions in terms of no availability of clear size measurements or charts, return policies that are not clearly explained, lack of delivery information, and too expensive delivery fees, and payment options that do not seems to be safe.

From the analyses it is clear that the important online visual merchandising themes and categories identified by the participants are closely linked with the main motivating factors associated with online shopping. The themes which the participants identified as important in influencing their online shopping were all themes which could either negatively or positively impact on the factor of convenience and the ability to browse and identify the available products quickly and easily.

Taking these motivating factors into consideration, the main themes identified by the participants as those which would influence their online shopping included, but were not limited to, website navigation, virtual layout and design, security, product presentation/display and product information. Within each of these main themes the participants identified the most important categories which would affect (increase/decrease) their online purchasing behaviour.

With regards to these main themes, the participants predominantly identified a clean, simple, organised and standardised layout, with the inclusion of key navigation features, such as a search function, product categories and logical menu options.

Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of trust in the website/brand with incorporated safety features as one of the key themes which would, if absent, deter them from purchasing from a specific website or brand.

With regards to product presentation, the participants indicated the importance of basic information, such as detailed and accurate size indication, price information, colour information and stock availability. In line with this, the participants highlighted the importance of basic product views, the use of a 3D method of presentation, and the critical importance of the zoom function. The importance of using various body shapes and human models which were more relatable or 'normal' models, as opposed to supermodels also came strongly to the fore.

Overall, the participants seemed to favour an online shopping e-store which is well structured, clean, simple and standardised, which is easy to use and which they can trust. Furthermore, they want an e-store which has at least the basic product information and basic product views and displays to allow them to make an informed decision on their purchase. Finally, information such as delivery time and return policy is critical, as these will inevitably impact on the convenience factor which underlies their motivation for shopping online. This includes the additional themes highlighted by participants of packaging and after-sales service. It is key to note that for participants and consumers, the online purchase is only complete when the package with their product arrives safely at their homes, with the packaging quality serving as a prominent factor in portraying and influencing the perceptions of consumers regarding the specific e-store or brand.

Holistically, all the online visual merchandising themes are closely linked with the website (e-store) brand, with the various themes ultimately serving to inform/reflect the image of the brand, and consequently the trust and willingness of consumers to purchase from a specific e-store or brand.

An important additional online visual merchandising theme which was identified by the participants was the possibility of a virtual image consultant function and/or a virtual image model. This essentially entails functions on the e-store where either assistance is provided in terms of suggesting, matching and compiling outfits for consumers, or where consumers are given the ability/option of building a virtual model of themselves on the e-store by inputting their specific measurements and body type to get a clearer

picture of how products and items will fit and suit them. These specific functions allude to a need by participants to further personalise their online shopping experience and to also increase the convenience of online shopping.

It is clear from the analyses that the various online visual merchandising themes are closely related, and that the various themes will consequently influence one another. Virtual layout and design, for example, will invariably not only have an impact on website navigation or the virtual atmospherics, but will also, as previously stated, impact on the website brand. Similarly, the website brand may serve to increase the trust that consumers have in the website and the perceived security of the website.

In terms of product information and product presentation, several themes associated with these go hand in hand. Colour information and colour presentation, for example, are closely linked, with the one being representative of written information and the other of visual information. This distinction was not always as clearly demarcated by the participants during the focus group discussions or in the survey questionnaires, and the distinction might inevitably also not be made by consumers in general.

In line with the above, it is clear from the perceptions of the participants that the underlying integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes is not as clearly delineated as depicted in the themes stemming from the literature. Whilst the list of existing online visual merchandising themes stemming from the literature, which was used as basis in the qualitative section, clearly delineates certain main themes consisting of several categories, the participants did not always make the same distinctions. To this end, it is important to propose and delineate a provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework which takes the theoretical identified themes, as well as the findings from the focus group discussions, short survey questionnaire and card sorting exercise, into account.

In order to determine and propose a provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, the findings of the focus group discussions, along with the findings from the short survey questionnaire and card sorting exercise, were taken into account and combined with a particular focus on the themes which were identified as important and that would have a definite influence on the increased likelihood of purchasing online.

The aim of the provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework is to provide a robust, initial framework that will form the baseline for a comprehensive conceptual integrated framework that could be used by apparel e-tailers to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

Table 5.16 below provides a robust outline of the proposed provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework developed from the qualitative research of the empirical study. The main themes were reduced to only nine themes with a total of 42 categories identified as presented in Table 5.16 below (see Appendix H).

**Table 5.16: Provisional conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes**

MAIN THEMES	CATEGORIES
<b>1. Virtual Layout, Design &amp; Navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website structure, layout and geometric</li> <li>▪ Navigation design</li> <li>▪ Website design and visual appeal</li> <li>▪ Pictures</li> <li>▪ Background colour</li> <li>▪ Text style and colour</li> <li>▪ Font colour</li> <li>▪ Search engine tools</li> <li>▪ Categorisation of items</li> <li>▪ Logical menu options</li> <li>▪ Website quality/ functionality</li> <li>▪ Quick and easy to work website</li> </ul>
<b>2. Product Information &amp; Presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Type of product views and presentation (2D/3D)</li> <li>▪ Zoom function</li> <li>▪ Colour presentation and information</li> <li>▪ Human models</li> <li>▪ Various body shapes</li> <li>▪ Product density</li> <li>▪ Image quality and size</li> <li>▪ Detailed size indication</li> <li>▪ Price indication</li> <li>▪ Product stock indication</li> </ul>
<b>3. Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protection of privacy</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Safe transactions</li> <li>▪ Ability to trust website</li> <li>▪ Incorporated security features</li> </ul>
<b>4. Customer Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Responsiveness and willingness to help</li> <li>▪ Shipping cost and information</li> <li>▪ Delivery terms indication</li> <li>▪ Return policy indication</li> <li>▪ Registration requirements</li> <li>▪ Content quality (completeness of information)</li> </ul>
<b>5. After-sale Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Product packaging</li> <li>▪ Product tracking</li> </ul>
<b>6. Website Brand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Image and personality</li> <li>▪ Trust in brand</li> </ul>
<b>7. Website Advertising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online sale promotions/advertising</li> <li>▪ E-store events</li> </ul>
<b>8. Virtual Social Presence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Product reviews/general customer reviews</li> <li>▪ E-tailer contact information/interaction tool</li> </ul>
<b>9. Personalisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Virtual image consultant</li> <li>▪ Virtual model</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own compilation

The provisional conceptual integrated framework of the online visual merchandising themes (see Table 5.16) that was developed from the findings of the qualitative research, was further used as the basis for the quantitative research done in Part 2 of the empirical study to quantitatively test the identified themes among South African online apparel consumers. The following section summarises the findings obtained from the qualitative research.

## 5.6 SUMMARY

Based on the data obtained from the qualitative research, it became evident that the participants mainly shop for apparel-related products online, because of its convenience and the availability of a wider range of products. Based on the semi-structured focus group schedule (see Appendix D), the main themes identified by participants which would influence their online shopping included, but were not limited to, website navigation, virtual layout and design, security, product presentation/display

and product information. Further, from the three data-collection activities, other important additional online visual merchandising themes were identified by the participants, which included a virtual image consultant function and/or a virtual image model, packaging, and after-sales service.

A provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework (Table 5.16) was developed based on the findings obtained from the qualitative research (focus group discussions, short survey questionnaire and card sorting) and the list of themes identified from the literature (see Appendix E). The chosen online visual merchandising themes in the provisional conceptual integrated framework were identified as being important by the participants and as having a definite influence on the increased likelihood of purchasing online. The provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework (Table 5:16) was used as the basis in the questionnaire design for the quantitative research.

The findings of the quantitative section will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, which is Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The current research study implemented a mixed-method design which was divided into two empirical sections: Part 1, the qualitative research, which as the name suggests, consisted of the qualitative part of the mixed-method approach, with the findings discussed in Chapter 5; and Part 2, the quantitative research, which consisted of the quantitative part of the mixed-method approach, and the findings will be discussed in this chapter, Chapter 6.

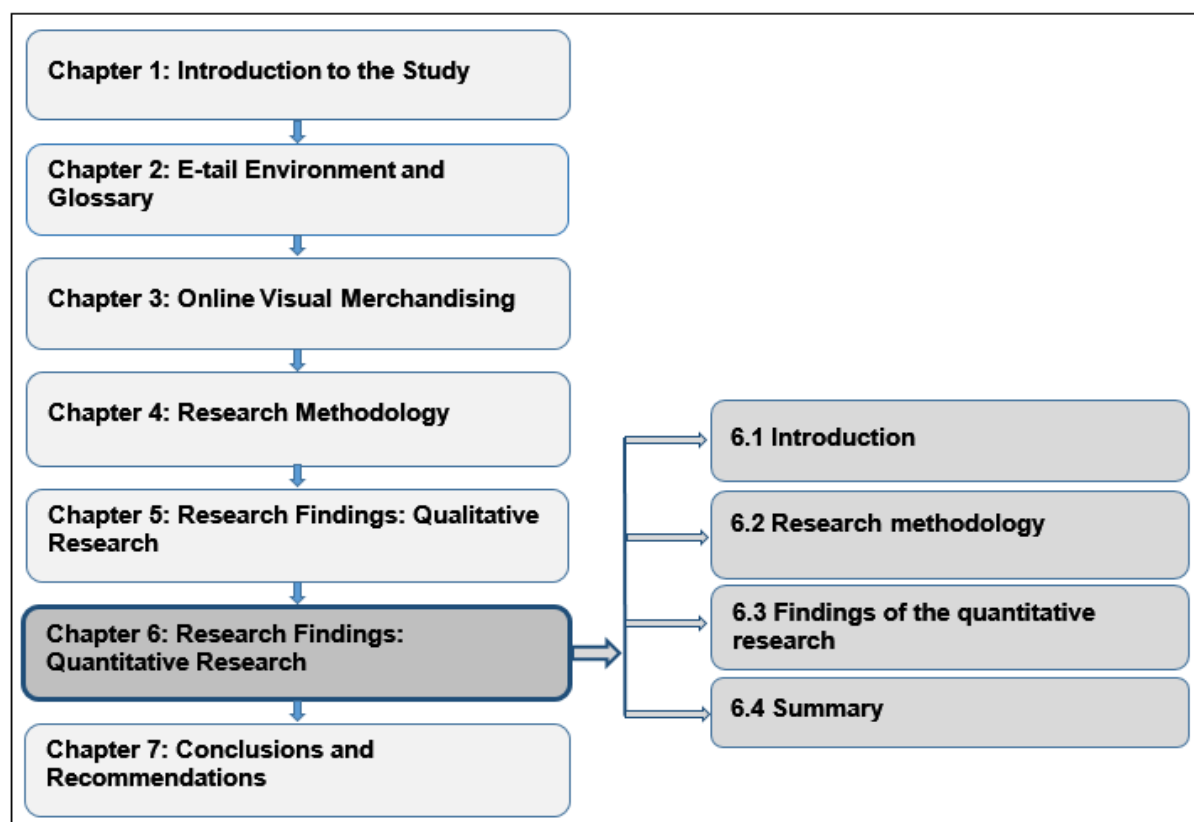
The findings obtained in Part 1 (the qualitative research) were used as the basis for Part 2 (the quantitative research) of the empirical research study, as discussed in Chapter 4 (methodology), and which is also the focus of this chapter. The findings obtained from the quantitative section are discussed in this chapter to address the research objectives of this study as outlined in Chapter 1 (introduction).

In the quantitative section, a self-administered web-based questionnaire was sent via e-mail to South African apparel consumers who have purchased apparel-related items from an apparel e-store before, and who were listed on iFeedback's Interactive Direct permissioned database with a population of 350 000 members.

The purpose of Chapter 6 is to provide the analyses and results of the quantitative section of the research which will aid in the development of a proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers in South Africa. The aim of the quantitative research was threefold: firstly, to statistically determine the underlying conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes (elements); secondly, to examine the relative importance of each of the identified themes; and thirdly, to examine the effect of the theoretically described online visual merchandising themes on purchasing behaviour.

The chapter commences with a discussion of the methodological procedure and design, the data-collection method, the sample, and the data analysis method. Thereafter, the findings obtained in the quantitative section are discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Figure 6.1 depicts the overall layout of the study, including where Chapter 6 fits in and the layout of Chapter 6.



**Figure 6.1: Structure of Chapter 6**

Source: Author's own compilation

As indicated in Figure 6.1 the section that follows deals with the research methodology of the quantitative research.

## **6.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The sections below discuss the research methodology followed in the quantitative research. It provides a discussion of the procedures and design used, how the data was collected from the sample elements, data normality, and lastly, how the data was analysed into meaningful findings.

### **6.2.1 Procedure and design**

As previously stated, this part of the empirical study was quantitative in nature. The provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that was established from the preceding qualitative research, was utilised to develop a self-

administered web-based questionnaire which aimed to measure the various online visual merchandising themes.

### **6.2.2 Data collection**

This part of the research collected data by utilising an internet-based version of the developed questionnaire, and which respondents completed on an online survey platform. The self-administered web-based questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A and Section B, as explained below.

Section A of the self-administered web-based questionnaire (refer to Appendix I) focused on the frequency of apparel-related online shopping by the respondents; the preferences of the respondents for well-known, as well as unknown, e-tailers; and the reasons for shopping online. Furthermore, Section A also included a list of 95 items that measured the various important online visual merchandising themes, which were identified from the framework stemming from the qualitative research. The respondents were required to rate each of the items for the various themes on a Likert scale ranging from '1 – Unimportant' to '5 – Very important'. (Refer to question 5 in the self-administered web-based questionnaire, Appendix I.)

Finally, Section A required the respondents to evaluate the provisional online visual merchandising themes derived from the qualitative research in terms of whether it would influence them to increase or decrease their online purchasing behaviour by using a Likert-scale ranging from '1 – Decrease online purchasing' to '3 – Increase online purchasing'. (Refer to question 6 in the self-administered web-based questionnaire, Appendix I.)

Section B of the questionnaire (questions 7 to 13) focused on the demographic profile of the respondents.

### **6.2.3 Sample design**

The overall sample for the quantitative study, after the data cleaning process, consisted of 622 respondents.

Table 6.1 below provides a detailed breakdown of the sample. The "no answer" values were also provided for completeness.

**Table 6.1: Demographic breakdown of sample**

	<b>n = 622</b>	<b>Percentage 100%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	191	30.7
Female	325	52.3
No answer	106	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 29	62	10
30 – 39	193	31
40 – 49	132	21.2
50 – 59	88	14.1
60 - 65	42	6.8
No answer	105	16.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Student	12	1.9
Unemployed	8	1.3
Employed	431	69.3
Self-employed	56	9
Retired	8	1.3
Other	2	0.3
No answer	105	16.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Up to R10 000	40	6.4
R10 001 – R30 000	160	25.7
R30 001 – R60 000	317	51
No answer	105	16.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>100</b>

	<b>n = 622</b>	<b>Percentage 100%</b>
<b>Location</b>		
Gauteng	314	50.5
North West	7	1.1
Limpopo	4	0.6
Western Cape	109	17.5
Eastern Cape	22	3.5
Northern Cape	1	0.2
Free State	13	2.1
Mpumalanga	11	1.8
Kwa-Zulu Natal	36	5.8
No answer	105	16.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own compilation

As depicted in Table 6.1, the sample included 30.70% males (n = 191) and 52.3 % females (n = 325), while 17% (n = 106) of the respondents did not respond to this question.

In terms of age, the majority of the sample were between the ages of 30-39 (31%, n=193), followed by 21.2% between the ages of 40-49 (n = 132).

The majority of the sample (69.3%) indicated that they were employed (n = 431) with the majority of respondents (51%) indicating that they earn a monthly income of R30 001 – R60 000 (n = 317), while 25.7% earn a monthly income of R10 001 – R30 000 (n = 160).

Finally, the majority of the respondents indicated that they were from Gauteng (50.5%, n = 314), followed by the Western Cape (17.5%, n = 109). A total of 105 respondents (16.9%) did not respond to this question.

Table 6.2 provides a detailed breakdown of the sample in terms of the reported frequency of apparel-related online shopping (see question 2 of the self-administered web-based questionnaire in Appendix I) and the percentage of income spent monthly

on online apparel-related shopping (see question 12 of the self-administered web-based questionnaire) as reported by the respondents.

**Table 6.2: Frequency of online shopping and percentage of income spent**

	<b>n n = 622</b>	<b>Percentage 100%</b>
<b>Frequency of online shopping</b>		
Once a year	118	19
2 – 5 times a year	306	49.2
Once a month	120	19.3
2 – 5 times a month	65	10.5
More than 5 times a month	13	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Percentage of income spent online</b>		
0%	7	1.1
Less than 10%	305	49.2
11-20%	160	25.7
21-40%	37	5.9
41-50%	4	0.6
More than 50%	4	0.6
No answer	105	16.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>622</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own compilation

The majority of respondents (49.2%) indicated that they shop for apparel-related products online between 2 to 5 times a year (n = 306). A comparison of the statistics shows that 68.2% (n = 424) of the respondents purchase apparel-related products online less than five times per year, whereas only 31.8 % (n = 198) of the respondents purchase apparel-related products on a monthly basis.

This is important to consider, as it shows that respondents are partaking in online shopping, but that it is in line with the argument of this study that online sales are still lower than brick-and-mortar sales (World Wide Worx, 2018; Reporter, 2018; Writer, 2016). Furthermore, the respondents predominantly indicated that they spend less



than 10% of their monthly gross income on apparel-related products online (49%, n = 305), and 1.1% (n = 7) indicated that they browse for apparel-related products online, but that they do not make any online purchase. Therefore, 51.1% (n = 312) of the respondents indicated that they spent less than 10% of their gross monthly income online on apparel-related products, which also adds to the argument of this study that online sales are still low in comparison to brick-and-mortar sales (World Wide Worx, 2018; Reporter, 2018; Writer, 2016). However, 32.2% (n = 201) of the respondents did indicate that they spent from 11 – 50% of their gross monthly income online on apparel-related products.

The respondents were further required to indicate where they personally shop for apparel-related products by assigning a percentage out of a total (adding up to 100%) to “Online” or “Physical” store” (see question 1 in the self-administered web-based questionnaire in Appendix I). Additionally, the respondents had to further indicate their preference between online apparel shopping from “Well-known e-tailers” and “Unknown e-tailers” (or a less known e-tailer) using the same method (see question 3 in the self-administered web-based questionnaire).

Table 6.3 below provides the mean and range for each of the options as indicated by the respondents:

**Table 6.3: Shopping preference**

	Mean	Range	
Shopping preference		Min	Max
Online	30.26	0	98
Physical store	69.84	2	100
Known vs Unknown e-tailer preference		Min	Max
Well-known e-tailers	78.73	0	100
Unknown e-tailers	20.15	0	100

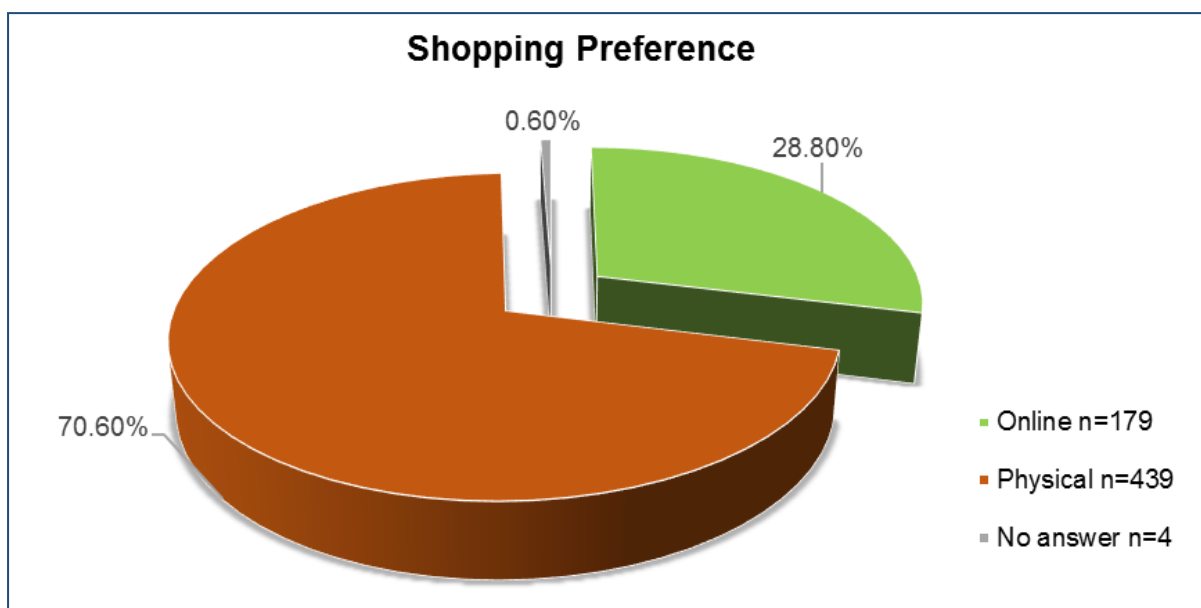
Source: Author’s own compilation

Respondents indicating that they preferred to shop from a physical store had a mean percentage of 69.84, as opposed to online with an assigned mean percentage of 30.26. Although the respondents indicated that they prefer to purchase apparel-related products at a physical store, they do still purchase from e-stores.

Furthermore, based on Table 6.3, the respondents indicated that they prefer to shop from well-known e-tailers ( $\bar{x} = 78.73$ ), such as Spree, Zando, Woolworths and so forth, as opposed to unknown e-tailers ( $\bar{x} = 20.15$ ) or e-tailers that are less known, such as smaller individual designers who have an e-store.

In line with the shopping preferences in Table 6.3, frequencies were calculated from the data to determine the number of respondents that preferred each option based on the percentages that they assigned to the different options of “Online” vs. “Physical store” as well as “Well-known e-tailer” vs. “Unknown e-tailer” (less known e-tailer).

Figures 6.2 and 6.3 below provide a breakdown of the results.



**Figure 6.2: Shopping preference “Online” vs. “Physical” apparel store**

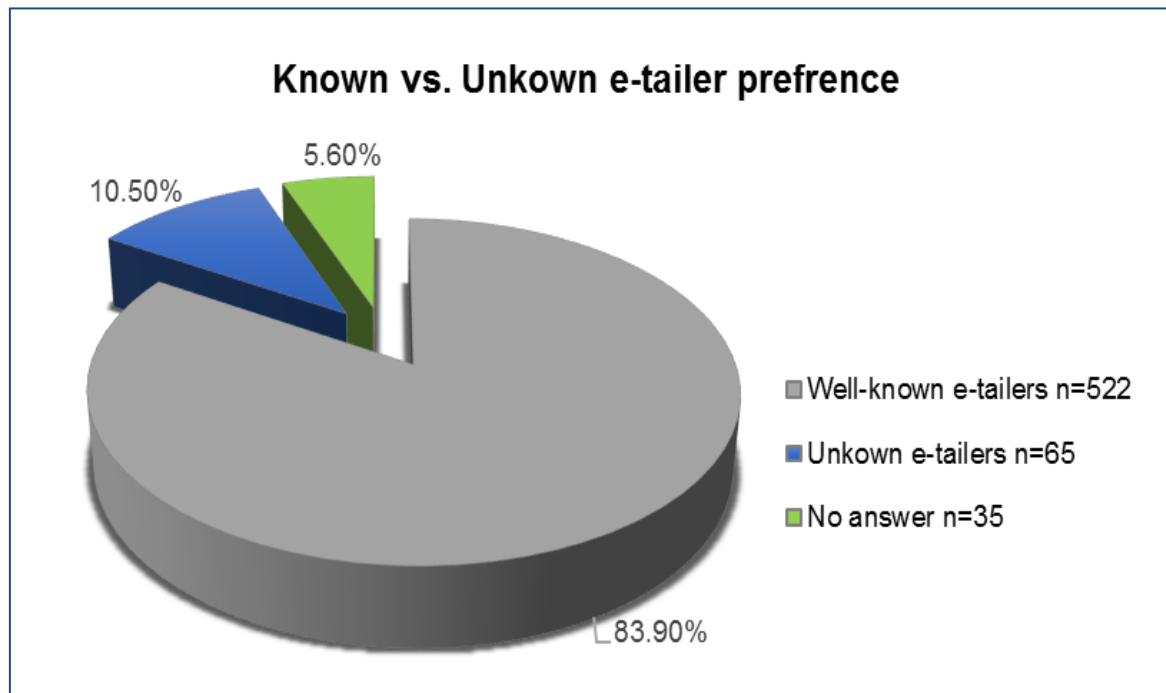
Source: Author’s own compilation

In terms of an indication of preference, as illustrated in Figure 6.2, the majority of the respondents assigned higher percentages to shopping at a “Physical” apparel store (70.60%,  $n = 439$ ), as opposed to “Online” apparel shopping (28.80%,  $n = 179$ ), which also relates to the fact that online sales are lower if compared to physical brick-and-mortar sales (World Wide Worx, 2018; Reporter, 2018; Writer, 2016). However, it is evident from Figure 6.2 that respondents still partake in online apparel-related shopping.

Similarly, the majority of the respondents (83.90%) assigned higher percentages to shopping from “Well-known apparel e-tailers” ( $n = 522$ ), as opposed to shopping from

“Unknown apparel e-tailers” or less known apparel e-tailers (10.50%, n = 65), as shown in Figure 6.3 below.

It is clear from these responses that e-tailers will have to ensure that the online apparel-related shopper are aware of their brand name, brands and products, as it would seem to instil some level of online e-tailer trust in online shoppers.

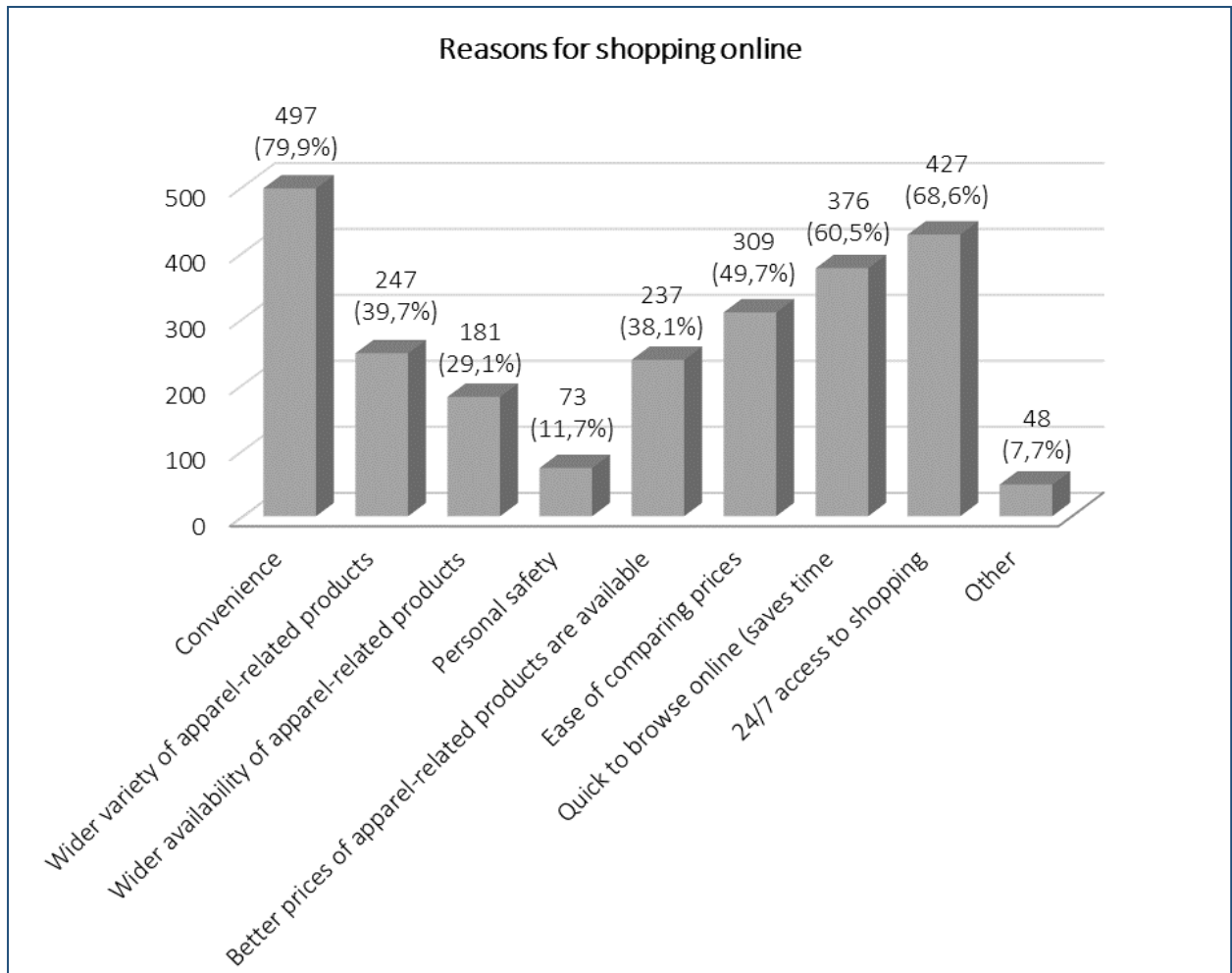


**Figure 6.3: Shopping preferences “Well-known” vs. “Unknown” apparel e-tailers**

Source: Author’s own compilation

The respondents were required to indicate all the reasons why they shop for apparel-related products online by selecting all the possible reasons from a pre-determined list. The respondents could also select an “other” option and then specify the reason for the “other” option, if the option was not included in the list (see question 4 in the self-administered web-based questionnaire in Appendix I).

Figure 6.4 below provides a breakdown of the reasons indicated by respondents as to why they shop for apparel-related products online.



**Figure 6.4: Reasons for online apparel-related shopping**

Source: Author's own compilation

According to the bar graph in Figure 6.4, “convenience” (79.9%,  $n = 497$ ), “24/7 access to shopping” (68.6%,  $n = 427$ ), “quick to browse online” (60.5%,  $n = 376$ ) and “ease of comparing prices” (49.7%,  $n = 309$ ) emerged as the main reasons identified by respondents as to why they shop for apparel-related products online.

The findings of the main reasons for shopping for apparel-related products online are similar to the findings obtained in the qualitative research (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.3.1), which indicated that participants mainly partake in online shopping activities due to the convenience behind it.

Furthermore, 7.70 % ( $n = 48$ ) of the respondents indicated “other” as a reason for shopping online. These respondents were required to specify their answer. The reasons advanced by respondents were closely aligned with “convenience”, “Wider variety of apparel-related products” and “Wider availability of apparel-related

products”. Furthermore, other reasons advanced as to why respondents shop for apparel-related products online and highlighted the availability of unique products and online sales. Direct quotations were provided to justify the findings:

- “... *Lack of lines and waiting times in supermarkets or stores*”
- “... *Don’t have to queue, don’t have to walk with bags of clothes in a mall from one shop to another*”
- “... *Struggle with sizes at Physical Stores*”
- “... *Niche items sometimes not available at stores in my area, specifically sports related apparel*”
- “... *Items only available online*”
- “... *Online sales*”

The following section refers to the data normality and data analysis methods used in the quantitative study.

#### **6.2.4 Data normality**

In terms of normality, the data was assessed utilising visual methods, in combination with an examination of the skewness and kurtosis of the variables included within the analyses. The data was found to be generally normally distributed, with some variables being found to be slightly negatively skewed. The variables within the analyses however were found to be within the parameters for normality (Das & Imon, 2016; Field, 2005; Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010).

#### **6.2.5 Data analyses**

The data collected for the quantitative study was analysed using SPSS 23. Common factor analyses using the principal axis factoring method, as well as reliability analyses, were conducted on the data. Principal axis factoring with an oblique (Direct Oblimin) rotation was utilised. Factors were subsequently extracted using a combination of methods, including the Kaiser criterion or latent root criterion (eigenvalues-greater-than-one), scree-plot test and the percentage of variance criterion.

The number of factors extracted was also considered in light of the *a priori* criterion based on the extrapolated conceptual integrated framework (developed in the

qualitative research) posited for the online visual merchandising themes underlying the self-administered web-based questionnaire.

The general rule of thumb, in conjunction with consideration of the sample size, was applied in identifying significant factor loadings, with only items with a factor loading of  $\geq .3$  considered in the analyses (Field, 2005; Hair *et al.*, 2010).

With regards to the reliability analyses, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each of the sub-scales.

In addition to the factor analysis, statistically significant differences were also evaluated using Independent Samples t-Tests.

### 6.3 FINDINGS OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The results will be presented by firstly examining the findings from the factor analyses. Secondly, the relative importance of each theme, in conjunction with the importance of each item which constitutes that theme, will be examined. Following this, the differences with regards to the demographic variables will be investigated. Finally, the results for the various factors in terms of their influence on online purchasing behaviour will be examined.

#### 6.3.1 Factor analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, as well as the Bartlett's test of sphericity were utilised to determine the factorability of the data.

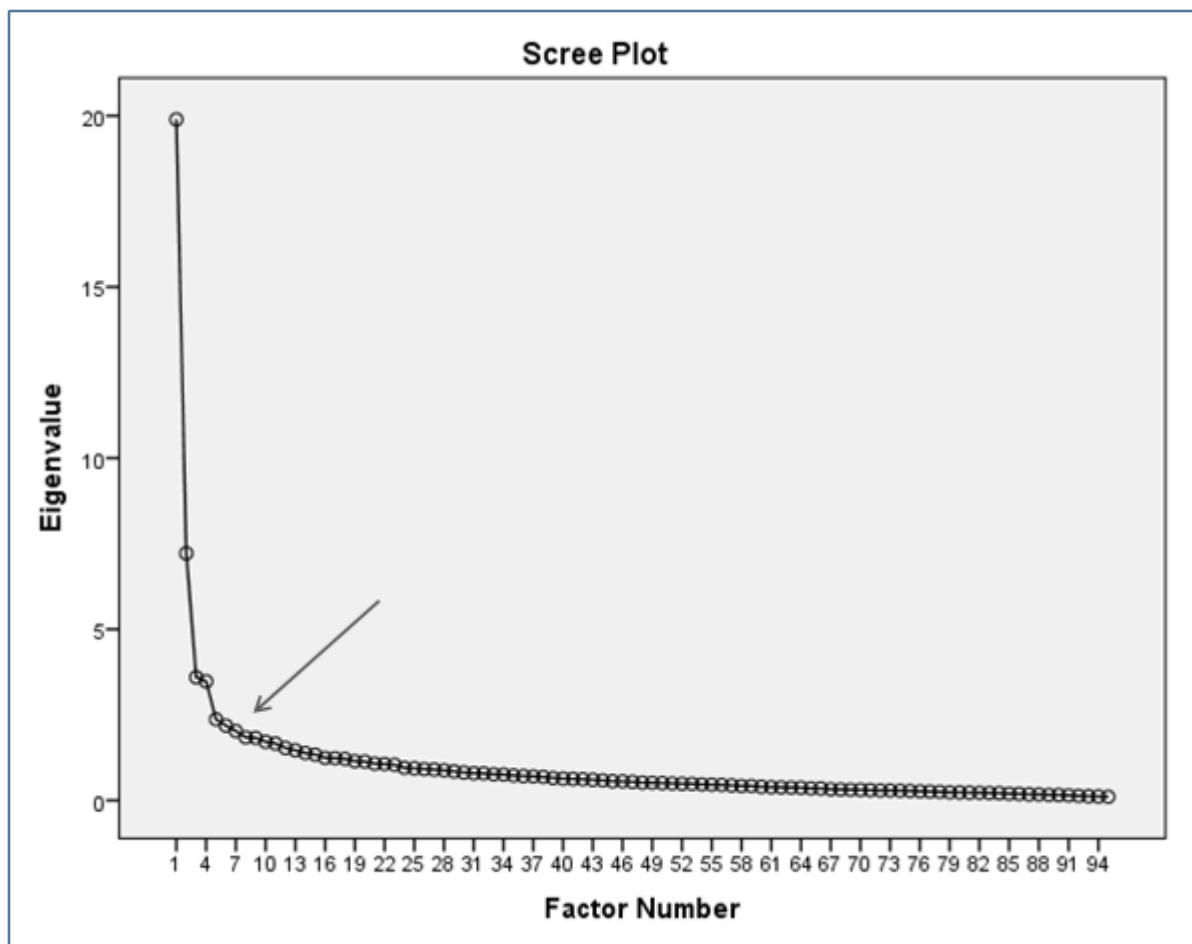
Both the KMO measure (.910) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity  $\chi^2$  (4465) = 26921.511,  $p < .01$ , indicated sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis, as shown in Table 6.4 below.

**Table 6.4: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of Sampling Adequacy		.910
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Apprx. Chi-Square	26921.511
	df	4465
	Sig.	.000

Source: Author's own compilation

The initial factor analysis on the data suggested the extraction of 21 factors using the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues-greater-than 1). This factor solution, however, yielded unstable factors, with several factors only having 1 or 2 significant primary loadings. This solution was thus not feasible. Further analyses were conducted to find a factor solution to better fit the data. The scree plot was further utilised to assist in identifying the number of factors to extract. Figure 6.5 provides the scree plot for the data.



**Figure 6.5: Scree plot**

An examination of the scree plot suggested the extraction of between 7 to 10 factors (point of inflection). The interpretation of the scree plot, however, may be difficult due to the number of items (or variables) included in the analyses. Next, the *a priori* criterion was considered in the extraction of the number of factors. The provisional conceptual integrated framework (developed in the qualitative research) postulated 9 factors (online visual merchandising themes). The number of factors extracted based on the scree plot, as well as the *a priori* criterion, did not yield satisfactory factor solutions, with the solutions yielding an insufficient number of primary factor loadings

for the various factors, as well as resulting in difficulty in interpreting the subsequent factors.

Consequently, the percentage of variance criterion was also considered to account for the maximum amount of variance in the data from the various factors. This finally led to the extraction of 13 factors which yielded a solution with sufficient primary loadings on each factor, as well as ensuring the interpretability of the extracted factors.

Table 6.5 below provides the pattern matrix for the final factor solution after rotation.



**Table 6.5: Pattern matrix (rotated factor matrix)**

Item	Factor												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1													
2													.501
3													.443
4											.762		
5											.693		
6											.615		
7													.531
8													.540
9													.689
10										.334			.409
11										.656			
12													
13			.371										
14			.409										
15			.614										
16			.567										

Item	Factor												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
17			.779										
18			.784										
19			.538										
20			.486										
21			.558										
22													.303
23													.339
24									.391				
25													
26									.405				
27									.472				
28									.819				
29									.784				
30										.500			
31										.454			
32										.489			
33													

Item	Factor												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
34										.475			
35										.543			
36										.481			
37	.366												
38	.404												
39	.406												
40	.378												
41						.525							
42						.749							
43						.786							
44						.764							
45		.311				.675							
46		.387				.411							
47													
48	.371												
49													
50	.545												

Item	Factor												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
51	.450												
52	.438												
53	.547												
54	.531												
55	.477												
56				.319									
57				.325									
58											.403		
59											.454		
60											.312		
61													
62											.322		
63				.309									
64				.402									
65				.323				.324					
66								.584					
67								.658					

Item	Factor												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
68								.490					
69				.361				.396					
70								.381					
71								.477					
72								.543					
73													
74													
75													
76				.441			.306						
77				.562									
78							.545						
79							.500						
80													
81							.745						
82							.817						
83							.611						
84							.429					.312	

Item	Factor												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
85					.529								
86					.961								
87					.785								
88					.422								
89					.360								
90													
91													
92		.452											
93		.553											
94		.723											
95		.744											

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 6.6 below provides a summarised version of the various items which loaded onto the different factors from the pattern matrix above.

**Table 6.6: Significant items per factor**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Items</b>
<b>Factor 1</b>	37, 38, 39, 40, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55
<b>Factor 2</b>	92, 93, 94, 95, 45*, 46*
<b>Factor 3</b>	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
<b>Factor 4</b>	56, 57, 63, 64, 76, 77, 65*, 69*
<b>Factor 5</b>	85, 86, 87, 88, 89
<b>Factor 6</b>	41, 42, 43, 44, 45*, 46*
<b>Factor 7</b>	78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84*, 76*
<b>Factor 8</b>	66, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 65*, 69*
<b>Factor 9</b>	24, 26, 27, 28, 29
<b>Factor 10</b>	11, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 10*
<b>Factor 11</b>	4, 5, 6
<b>Factor 12</b>	58, 59, 60, 62, 84*
<b>Factor 13</b>	2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 22, 23, 10*

\*Items that load significantly onto more than 1 factor

Source: Author's own compilation

Overall, the factor analysis of the data yielded 13 factors. Items 1, 12, 25, 33, 47, 49, 61, 73, 74, 75, 80, 90 and 91 did not load significantly (factor loading < .3) onto any of the extracted factors. Out of the original 95, 82 items loaded significantly onto the 13 factors and were retained.

From Tables 6.5 and 6.6 it is clear that items 10, 45, 46, 65, 69, 76 and 84 cross-loaded onto more than one factor. These items were consequently grouped within the appropriate factor, based on the consideration of their relative factor loadings and their item content, with items predominantly grouped within the factor with which their item content was most closely related.

### 6.3.1.1 *Factor labels*

Utilising the provisional conceptual integrated framework (developed in the qualitative research) for online visual merchandising themes (see Appendix H), in conjunction with the specific item content of the items within the various extracted factors, labels could now be assigned to the extracted factors (13 factors in total).

Tables 6.7 to 6.19 provide a breakdown of the various items and their content per factor.

The first factor identified refers to “Product information and presentation: Price, colour and size presentation and information” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.7: Factor 1 - Product information and presentation: Price, colour and size presentation and information**

Item	Content	Loading
37	Availability of product colour options	.366
38	Product colour options that are available are shown on the garment	.404
39	Product colour is presented accurately	.406
40	Product colour description is detailed	.378
48	Product pictures are clear	.371
50	Detailed size chart is available	<b>.545</b>
51	Size chart that is available in all conversions (e.g. UK, US, SA)	.450
52	Size chart that is provided when the brand/e-tailer is unknown	.438
53	Prices of products are provided	<b>.547</b>
54	All pricing options are provided per garment size	<b>.531</b>
55	Product availability is indicated	.477

Source: Author's own compilation

The items which load significantly onto factor 1 (Table 6.7) predominantly relate to the online visual merchandising theme of “Product Information and Presentation”. In terms of the item content, the items relate to the presentation and description of colours, as well as the provision and display of information regarding size, pricing and availability. The highest loading items were item 53 (.547) “Prices of products are provided”, item 50 (.547) “Detailed size chart is available” and item 54 (.531) “All pricing options are provided per garment size”.



Factor 1 can thus be labelled “Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation & Information”.

The second factor identified refers to “Personalisation” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.8: Factor 2 - Personalisation**

Item	Content	Loading
<b>92</b>	Assistance/advice given by the e-tailer on the website about product colours, styles, and so forth.	.452
<b>93</b>	Ability to communicate with an online image consultant	.553
<b>94</b>	Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website	<b>.723</b>
<b>95</b>	Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape	<b>.744</b>

Source: Author’s own compilation

The content of the items within factor 2 predominantly focus on “Personalisation”. Item 95 (.744) “Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape” and item 94 (.723) “Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website” were found to be the highest loading items (see Table 6.8). The factor can thus be labelled as “Personalisation”.

The third factor identified refers to “Virtual layout and design: Visual design and appeal” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.9: Factor 3 - Virtual layout and design: Visual design and appeal**

Item	Content	Loading
<b>13</b>	Background colour that is neutral	.371
<b>14</b>	Background colours that are bright	.409
<b>15</b>	Background colour that complements the product	.614
<b>16</b>	Font colour that is neutral	.567
<b>17</b>	Font colour that complements the picture	<b>.779</b>
<b>18</b>	Font colour that complements the background colour	<b>.784</b>
<b>19</b>	Font style that is basic	.538
<b>20</b>	Font style that is cursive	.486
<b>21</b>	Font style that complements the brand image	.558

Source: Author’s own compilation

The content for the items which load onto factor 3 (Table 6.9) relate to the online visual merchandising theme of “Virtual Layout and Design”. More specifically, the item content pertains to the visual appeal of the website.

In terms of factor loadings, item 18 (.784) “Font colour that complements the background colour” and item 17 (.779) “Font colour that complements the picture”, were found to have the highest factor loadings. The label “Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal” can thus be assigned to factor 3.

The following factor that was identified was factor 4 which refers to “Security: Measures and trust in the unknown e-tailer and website” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.10: Factor 4 - Security: Measures and trust in unknown e-tailer and website**

Item	Content	Loading
<b>56</b>	Secured shopping experience	.319
<b>57</b>	Personal information is secured	.325
<b>63</b>	A secured website html (https)	.309
<b>64</b>	E-tailer that responds to queries quickly/promptly	.402
<b>76</b>	Detailed information about the e-tailer is provided, if the e-tailer is unknown	<b>.441</b>
<b>77</b>	E-tailer contact information is available	<b>.562</b>

Source: Author’s own compilation

The items within factor 4, as shown in Table 6.10, variably relate to the online visual merchandising themes of “Security” and “Customer Service” from the provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework (derived from the qualitative research).

The specific item content refers to a secured online shopping experience, secured personal information, as well as the availability of information and contact information for the e-tailer, specifically an unknown e-tailer.

Item 76 (.441) “Detailed information about the e-tailer is provided, if the e-tailer is unknown” and item 77 (.562) “E-tailer contact information is available” were found to have the highest factor loadings on the factor. Considering the factor loadings and taking into account the combination of the item content for the various items, their relation to the provisional online visual merchandising themes of “Security” and

“Customer Service”, together with the stated need for detailed information, specifically if the e-tailer is ‘unknown’ (or less known), and the availability of contact information of the e-tailer, it can be deduced that the factor may deal more with an element of trust in the ‘unknown’ e-tailer. The factor can thus be labelled as “Security: Measures and Trust in the Unknown E-tailer and Website”.

Factor 5 refers to “Website advertising” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.11: Factor 5 – Website advertising**

Item	Content	Loading
85	Online promotion events (specials) that are available	.529
86	To be notified about an online sale	<b>.961</b>
87	To be notified about an online sale via email	<b>.785</b>
88	To be notified about an online sale via SMS	.422
89	General reviews of the e-tailer’s website	.360

Source: Author’s own compilation

As illustrated in Table 6.11, the items within factor 5 predominantly relate to the online visual merchandising theme of “Website Advertising”. Item 86 (.961) “To be notified about an online sale” and item 87 (.785) “To be notified about an online sale via email”, were found to have the highest factor loadings. The factor is thus labelled as “Website Advertising”.

The sixth factor that was identified refers to “Product presentation: Models and body shape display” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.12: Factor 6 - Product presentation: Models and body shape display**

Item	Content	Loading
41	Human models are used	.525
42	Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)	<b>.749</b>
43	Availability of various body shapes	<b>.786</b>
44	Products are presented on each type of body shape	<b>.764</b>
45	Ability to select your size on the body shape	.675
46	Ability to select your height on the body shape	.411

Source: Author’s own compilation

Factor 6 consists of items related more specifically to the use of human models, and the availability and inclusion of various body shapes in the presentation of products. The items within factor 6, thus essentially relate to the online visual merchandising theme of “Product Presentation and Information”.

Item 43 (.786) “Availability of various body shapes”, item 44 (.764) “Products are presented on each type of body shape”, and item 42 (.749) “Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)” were found to be the highest loading items on factor 6 (see Table 6.12).

The label “Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display” is thus appropriate for the factor.

The seventh factor that was identified refers to “Website and e-tailer brand” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.13: Factor 7 - Website and e-tailer brand**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Loading</b>
<b>78</b>	Product packaging in general represents the e-tailer	.545
<b>79</b>	Quality of product packaging	.500
<b>81</b>	E-tailer’s brand image is good	<b>.745</b>
<b>82</b>	E-tailer/website brand image is well-designed	<b>.817</b>
<b>83</b>	Personality of the website brand is inviting (nice to browse)	.611

Source: Author’s own compilation

Based on Table 6.13, the items loading onto factor 7 relate to the online visual merchandising theme of “Website Brand” and refer to the website brand and brand image of the e-tailer.

Item 82 (.817) “E-tailer/website brand image is well-designed” and item 81 (.745) “E-tailer’s brand image is good” were found to have the highest factor loading on the factor.

The factor can thus be labelled “Website and E-tailer Brand”.

The following factor refers to factor 8 – “Customer service: Delivery and returns” and are discussed below.

**Table 6.14: Factor 8 - Customer service: Delivery and returns**

Item	Content	Loading
65	Delivery information that is complete	.324
66	Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price	<b>.584</b>
67	Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)	<b>.658</b>
68	Free delivery on purchases over a certain amount	.490
69	Delivery time frames are provided	.396
70	Complete return policy that is available	.381
71	Product returns that are easy	.477
72	Product returns that are free	.543

Source: Author's own compilation

Factor 8 consists of items which relate primarily to product delivery, as well as to the returns policy associated with the e-tailer, and relates to the online visual merchandising theme of "Customer Service".

Item 67 (.658) "Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)" and item 66 (.584) "Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price" were found to have the highest factor loadings, as shown in Table 6.14 above.

The factor can thus be labelled as "Customer Service: Delivery and Returns".

Factor 9 refers to "Virtual layout and design: Functionality, logical categorisation and virtual navigation" and is discussed in more detail below.

**Table 6.15: Factor 9 - Virtual layout and design: Functionality, logical categorisation and virtual navigation**

Item	Content	Loading
24	Product categorisation that is logical	.391
26	Menu options that are logical (e.g. women –shoes – sneakers)	.405
27	Menu option names are relevant (e.g. women's wear, men's wear)	.472
28	Download speed of pictures	<b>.819</b>
29	Download speed of information	<b>.784</b>

Source: Author's own compilation

If the provisional conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes (developed in the qualitative research) is examined, the items relate primarily to the visual merchandising theme of “Virtual Layout and Design”. More specifically, the content of the items relate to the logical categorisation, as well as virtual navigation and functionality of the website.

Item 28 (.819) “Download speed of pictures” and item 29 (.784) “Download speed of information” were found to have the highest factor loadings on factor 9 (see Table 6.15). Both of these items highlight the importance of the website’s functionality.

The factor can thus be assigned the label “Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation”.

The tenth factor that was identified, refers to “Product presentation: Product view and presentation” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.16: Factor 10 - Product presentation: Product view and presentation**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Loading</b>
<b>11</b>	Pictures show various angles of the product	<b>.656</b>
<b>30</b>	Three product views (front, back and side) are available per product	.500
<b>31</b>	Large product views	.454
<b>32</b>	Products are presented in 3D format	.489
<b>34</b>	Product views can turn 360 degrees	.475
<b>35</b>	Availability of a zoom function	<b>.543</b>
<b>36</b>	Zoom function that shows the type of material of the garment	.481

Source: Author’s own compilation

The items which constitute factor 10 primarily relate to the online visual merchandising theme of “Product Presentation and Information”. The items specifically relate to the presentation of products and the specific views or tools to view products.

The item with the highest factor loading (.656) was found to be item 11 “Pictures show various angles of the product”, followed by item 35 (.543) “Availability of a zoom function”, as shown in Table 6.16.

The factor can thus be labelled “Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation”.

The following factor that was identified was factor 11 which relates to “Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation”.

**Table 6.17: Factor 11- Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation**

Item	Content	Loading
4	Hyperlinks that are available	.762
5	Hyperlinks that open on another webpage/window	.693
6	Hyperlinks on the website take me to the right place	.615

Source: Author’s own compilation

The items within factor 11 refer solely to hyperlinks, and if the provisional conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes (developed in the qualitative research) is consulted, the items relate mainly to “Virtual Layout and Design”.

The highest loading item on the factor, according to Table 6.17, was found to be item 4 (.762) “Hyperlinks that are available”. The factor can thus be assigned the label “Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation”.

The following factor refers to factor 12 which is labelled “Security: Measures and Trust in the Well-Known E-tailer and Website” and is discussed below.

**Table 6.18: Factor 12 - Security: Measures and Trust in the Well-Known E-tailer and Website**

Item	Content	Loading
58	Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer	.403
59	Login with details (username and password) are required	.454
60	Saving of credit card details is optional	.312
62	Detailed information, such as copyright and date of registration of the website	.322
84	E-tailer’s brand is well-known	.312

Source: Author’s own compilation

The items within factor 12 (see Table 6.18) also predominantly stem from the online visual merchandising theme of “Security”, similarly to factor 4 discussed previously. If the item content is scrutinised in more detail, the item content relates specifically to

the credibility of the e-tailer and the website, as well as the available security measures to protect personal and financial details.

Item 58 (.403) “Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer” and item 59 (.454) “Login with details (username and password) are required” were found to have the highest loadings on the factor.

Although the item content and factor may be closely related to factor 4, the items within this factor refer to the ‘well-known’ e-tailer or brand in relation to security. The factor can thus be labelled as “Security: Measures and Trust in the Well-Known E-tailer and Website”.

The last factor that was identified referred to factor 13 “Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use”.

**Table 6.19: Factor 13 - Virtual layout and design: General design, structure and ease of use**

Item	Content	Loading
2	Website layout that is easy to use	.501
3	Easy to find what I am looking for on the website	.443
7	Website design that is basic (not cluttered)	<b>.531</b>
8	Visual feel/appearance of the website	<b>.540</b>
9	Website design that is well organised	<b>.689</b>
10	Product pictures are of high quality	.409
22	Availability of a search function	.303
23	Search function that works well	.339

Source: Author’s own compilation

The items within the final factor resulting from the analysis relate specifically to the online visual merchandising theme of “Virtual Layout and Design”. The item content refers specifically to the layout, organisation and design of the website, as well as the visual feel of the website. The item content seemingly relates to a general overview of the design and layout of the website.

Item 9 (.689) “Website design that is well organised”, item 8 (.540) “Visual feel/appearance of the website” and item 7 (.531) “Website design that is basic (not cluttered)”, had the highest factor loadings on the factor (see Table 6.19).



Factor 13 can thus be labelled as “Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use”.

Table 6.20 below provides a summary of the factors stemming from the factor analysis and their assigned labels.

**Table 6.20: Factor labels**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Label</b>
<b>Factor 1</b>	Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information
<b>Factor 2</b>	Personalisation
<b>Factor 3</b>	Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal
<b>Factor 4</b>	Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website
<b>Factor 5</b>	Website Advertising
<b>Factor 6</b>	Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display
<b>Factor 7</b>	Website and E-tailer Brand
<b>Factor 8</b>	Customer Service: Delivery and Returns
<b>Factor 9</b>	Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation
<b>Factor 10</b>	Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation
<b>Factor 11</b>	Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation
<b>Factor 12</b>	Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website
<b>Factor 13</b>	Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use

Source: Author’s own compilation

The 13 factors extracted and identified from the analysis provide the statistically delineated structure and conceptual integrated framework for the online visual merchandising themes, with the factors constituting the sub-scales to be utilised in measuring each of the online visual merchandising themes.

### **6.3.1.2 Factor correlation matrix**

In terms of the relationship between the factors, small positive correlations ( $\geq .1$ ) to moderate positive correlations ( $\geq .3$ ) were found between the extracted factors (see Table 6.21). Several factors were also found to have very small correlations  $< .1$ .

Despite this, the overall factor correlation matrix suggests that the factors are interrelated.

**Table 6.21: Correlation matrix for online visual merchandising factors**

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1												
2	.109	1											
3	<b>.049</b>	.214	1										
4	.290	<b>.023</b>	<b>.029</b>	1									
5	.173	.248	.214	<b>.056</b>	1								
6	.168	.194	.153	<b>.069</b>	.236	1							
7	.129	.285	.303	.121	.357	.143	1						
8	.308	<b>.041</b>	.052	.226	.256	.181	.268	1					
9	.377	<b>.055</b>	.058	.251	.101	.186	.146	.344	1				
10	.266	.183	.193	.085	.239	.241	.207	.204	.240	1			
11	.190	.204	.345	.106	.221	.169	.268	.148	.216	.270	1		
12	<b>.059</b>	.179	.102	.064	.230	.065	.200	.143	<b>.044</b>	<b>.035</b>	.103	1	
13	.359	<b>.062</b>	.126	.289	<b>.059</b>	.128	.151	.239	.413	.227	.221	.018	1

Source: Author's own compilation

### **6.3.1.3 Reliability analyses**

Following the factor analysis, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for each of the various factors (sub-scales) were calculated.

Table 6.22 provides a breakdown of the resulting Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

**Table 6.22: Cronbach's alpha coefficients per scale**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>
<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information</b>	37, 38, 39, 40, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55	.853
<b>Personalisation</b>	92, 93, 94, 95	.848
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21	.837
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	56, 57, 63, 64, 76, 77	.748
<b>Website Advertising</b>	85, 86, 87, 88, 89	.768
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>	41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46	.871
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>	78, 79, 81, 82, 83	.848
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>	65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	.800
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>	24, 26, 27, 28, 29	.827
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>	11, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36	.836
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>	4, 5, 6	.723
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	58, 59, 60, 62, 84	.652
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>	2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 22, 23	.829

Source: Author's own compilation

From Table 6.22 it is clear that all the scales were found to have a good internal consistency and reliability, with all the Cronbach's alpha coefficients > 0.6. (Field, 2005; Hair *et al.*, 2010).

### **6.3.2 Relative importance of online visual merchandising themes**

Having statistically delineated the conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes, the next step in the analysis process examined the relative importance of each of the identified themes, as well as the items which constitute each theme, within the framework. To this end, the mean scores for each of the items within

the various themes was firstly calculated and compared. This is presented in Table 6.23 below.

**Table 6.23: Rankings of items per theme**

	Item	Mean
<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Info</b>		
37	Availability of product colour options	4.481
38	Product colour options that are available are shown on the garment	4.401
39	Product colour is presented accurately	4.571
40	Product colour description is detailed	4.193
48	Product pictures are clear	4.522
50	Detailed size chart that is available	4.526
51	Size chart that is available in all conversions (e.g. UK, US, SA)	4.406
52	Size chart that is provided when the brand/e-tailer is unknown	4.408
53	Prices of products are provided	<b><u>4.771</u></b>
54	All pricing options are provided per garment size	4.587
55	Product availability is indicated	<b><u>4.724</u></b>
<b>Personalisation</b>		
92	Assistance/advice given by the e-tailer on the website about product colours, styles and so forth.	<b><u>3.819</u></b>
93	Ability to communicate with an online image consultant	3.462
94	Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website	3.609
95	Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape	<b><u>3.620</u></b>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>		
13	Background colour that is neutral	<b><u>3.584</u></b>
14	Background colours that are bright	2.473
15	Background colour that complements the product	3.176
16	Font colour that is neutral	3.297
17	Font colour that complements the picture	3.072
18	Font colour that complements the background colour	3.059
19	Font style that is basic	<b><u>3.538</u></b>

	Item	Mean
20	Font style that is cursive	2.200
21	Font style that complements the brand image	3.202
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>		
56	Secured shopping experience	<u>4.835</u>
57	Personal information is secured	<u>4.889</u>
63	A secured website html (https)	4.628
64	E-tailer that responds to queries quickly/promptly	4.618
76	Detailed information about the e-tailer is provided, if the e-tailer is unknown	4.269
77	E-tailer contact information is available	4.509
<b>Website Advertising</b>		
85	Online promotion events (specials) that are available	<u>4.147</u>
86	To be notified about an online sale	<u>3.904</u>
87	To be notified about an online sale via email	3.737
88	To be notified about an online sale via SMS	2.887
89	General reviews of the e-tailer's website	3.733
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>		
41	Human models are used	3.605
42	Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)	<u>3.929</u>
43	Availability of various body shapes	3.881
44	Products are presented on each type of body shape	3.631
45	Ability to select your size on the body shape	<u>3.970</u>
46	Ability to select your height on the body shape	3.603
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>		
78	Product packaging in general represents the e-tailer	3.724
79	Quality of product packaging	3.848
81	E-tailer's brand image is good	<u>4.120</u>
82	E-tailer/website brand image is well-designed	4.055
83	Personality of the website brand is inviting (nice to browse)	<u>4.186</u>

	Item	Mean
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>		
65	Delivery information that is complete	<u>4.744</u>
66	Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price	3.981
67	Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)	4.248
68	Free delivery on purchases over a certain amount	4.438
69	Delivery time frames are provided	4.701
70	Complete return policy that is available	4.712
71	Product returns that are easy	<u>4.744</u>
72	Product returns that are free	4.571
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>		
24	Product categorisation that is logical	<u>4.620</u>
26	Menu options that are logical (e.g. women –shoes – sneakers)	<u>4.664</u>
27	Menu option names are relevant (e.g. women wear, men's wear)	<u>4.620</u>
28	Download speed of pictures	4.403
29	Download speed of information	4.401
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>		
11	Pictures show various angles of the product	<u>4.497</u>
30	Three product views (front, back and side) are available per product	<u>4.355</u>
31	Large product views	4.176
32	Products are presented in 3D format	3.548
34	Product views can turn 360 degrees	3.698
35	Availability of a zoom function	4.309
36	Zoom function that shows the type of material of the garment	4.234
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>		
4	Hyperlinks that are available	<u>3.552</u>
5	Hyperlinks that open on another webpage/window	3.086
6	Hyperlinks on the website take me to the right place	<u>4.223</u>

	Item	Mean
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>		
<b>58</b>	Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer	<b><u>4.564</u></b>
<b>59</b>	Login with details (username and password) are required	<b><u>4.344</u></b>
<b>60</b>	Saving of credit card details is optional	4.105
<b>62</b>	Detailed information, such as copyright and date of registration of the website	3.417
<b>84</b>	E-tailer's brand is well-known	3.643
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>		
<b>2</b>	Website layout that is easy to use	<b><u>4.692</u></b>
<b>3</b>	Easy to find what I am looking for on the website	4.656
<b>7</b>	Website design that is basic (not cluttered)	4.431
<b>8</b>	Visual feel/appearance of the website	4.336
<b>9</b>	Website design that is well organised	4.585
<b>10</b>	Product pictures are of high quality	4.608
<b>22</b>	Availability of a search function	4.619
<b>23</b>	Search function that works well	<b><u>4.759</u></b>

\*Items with highest mean scores in bold and underlined

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 6.23 above provides an indication of the most important items within each of the online visual merchandising themes. In terms of the relative importance of various items included under the themes of the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, 60.97% of the items received a mean rating > 4, with 35.37% of the items receiving a mean rating >3.

Interestingly, 3 items were found to have a mean rating < 3, indicating that respondents did not view them as important. These items included item 14 "Background colours that are bright", item 20 "Font style that is cursive", and item 88 "To be notified about an online sale via SMS". Considering the relative unimportance of these items, they were consequently removed from the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework.

In order to ascertain the relative importance of each of the online visual merchandising themes, the mean rating for each of the themes, as well as the mean total percentage score was calculated.

Table 6.24 provides a breakdown of the results, with the themes ranked in terms of their relative importance.

**Table 6.24: Rankings of items per themes**

Online Visual Merchandising Themes	Mean	Total %	Rank
<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information</b>	4.516	90.33	<b>5</b>
<b>Personalisation</b>	3.628	72.56	<b>11</b>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>	3.275	65.51	<b>13</b>
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	4.625	92.49	<b>1</b>
<b>Website Advertising</b>	3.880	77.60	<b>9</b>
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>	3.775	75.50	<b>10</b>
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>	3.987	79.73	<b>8</b>
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>	4.518	90.35	<b>4</b>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>	4.542	90.83	<b>3</b>
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>	4.117	82.34	<b>6</b>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>	3.620	72.41	<b>12</b>
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	4.015	80.29	<b>7</b>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>	4.586	91.71	<b>2</b>

Source: Author's own compilation

According to Table 6.24, “Security: Measures and Trust in the **Unknown** E-tailer and Website” (4.625, 92.49%), along with “Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use” (4.586, 91.71%), and “Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation” (4.542, 90.83%) were found to be the highest ranked themes in terms of relative importance, followed closely by “Customer Service: Delivery and Returns” (4.518, 90.35%), and “Product



Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information” (4.516, 90.33%).

The lowest ranked theme was found to be “Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal” (3.275, 65.51%). The respondents thus felt that this theme was less important when compared to the other themes, and it may allude to the fact that visual appeal may be a secondary consideration for consumers, especially if compared to functionality, ease of use, security, customer service, product information, and presentation when shopping online for apparel-related products.

### **6.3.3 Relationship between online visual merchandising themes**

This section presents the correlations between the various online visual merchandising themes extracted for the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework,

Table 6.25, on the next page, provides a breakdown of the correlations between the factors calculated using the total scores for the factors.

As was found from the factor correlation matrix stemming from the exploratory factor analysis in Table 6.25, it is clear that the themes were all interrelated.

Pearson correlations were conducted between the themes to examine the correlations between the various themes. As can be seen on Table 6.25, small positive correlations ( $\geq .1$ ), moderate positive correlations ( $\geq .3$ ) and strong positive correlations ( $\geq .5$ ) were found between all the themes. All the correlations were found to be significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

**Table 6.25: Pearson correlations between themes**

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1												
2	.361**	1											
3	.293**	.314**	1										
4	.623**	.350**	.213**	1									
5	.365**	.388**	.292**	.313**	1								
6	.406**	.530**	.303**	.274**	.342**	1							
7	.425**	.464**	.462**	.494**	.440**	.314**	1						
8	.623**	.332**	.236**	.593**	.362**	.311*	.440**	1					
9	.692**	.251**	.281**	.544**	.267**	.304**	.392**	.583**	1				
10	.612**	.423**	.351**	.460**	.395**	.495**	.426**	.496**	.572**	1			
11	.308**	.235**	.310**	.249**	.211**	.224**	.236**	.199**	.306**	.315**	1		
12	.357**	.737**	.287**	.458**	.431**	.355**	.531**	.398**	.328**	.374**	.211**	1	
13	.701**	.223**	.360**	.539**	.280**	.294**	.403**	.506**	.719**	.590**	.341**	.308**	1

\*\* Significant at the  $p < .01$  level

Source: Author's own compilation

### 6.3.4 Statistical comparisons

This section provides a discussion on the statistical comparisons that were made between males and females, and the known and unknown e-tailer preference.

#### 6.3.4.1 Statistical comparisons based on gender

In order to examine the differences between males and females with regards to the importance of the items and themes related to the various online visual merchandising themes, an investigation was done into statistical comparisons for each of the various themes and their items.

Table 6.26 below provides a breakdown of the various items within each of the online visual merchandising themes where statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were found between males and females:

**Table 6.26: Significant differences between males and females per item and theme**

Item		Mean(M)	Mean(F)	Sig.
<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Info</b>				
<b>37</b>	Availability of product colour options	4.367	4.579	.000**
<b>38</b>	Product colour options that are available are shown on the garment	4.335	4.495	.014*
<b>39</b>	Product colour is presented accurately	4.439	4.683	.000**
<b>40</b>	Product colour description is detailed	4.094	4.286	.023*
<b>48</b>	Product pictures are clear	4.419	4.584	.005**
<b>50</b>	Detailed size chart that is available	4.429	4.591	.007**
<b>53</b>	Prices of products are provided	4.696	4.819	.014*
<b>54</b>	All pricing options are provided per garment size	4.476	4.655	.018*
<b>Personalisation</b>				
<b>94</b>	Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website	3.456	3.705	.026*
<b>95</b>	Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape	3.456	3.792	.014*
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>				
<b>13</b>	Background colour that is neutral	3.434	3.665	0.30*
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>				
<b>56</b>	Secured shopping experience	4.785	4.877	.044*

Item		Mean(M)	Mean(F)	Sig.
<b>Website Advertising</b>				
<b>85</b>	Online promotion events (specials) that are available	4.042	4.215	.049*
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>				
<b>41</b>	Human models are used	3.147	3.868	.000**
<b>42</b>	Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)	3.471	3.225	.000**
<b>43</b>	Availability of various body shapes	3.461	4.139	.000**
<b>44</b>	Products are presented on each type of body shape	3.288	3.825	.000**
<b>45</b>	Ability to select your size on the body shape	3.744	4.117	.001**
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>				
<b>79</b>	Quality of product packaging	4.000	3.745	.011*
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>				
<b>66</b>	Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price	3.780	4.089	.003**
<b>67</b>	Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)	4.052	4.363	.000**
<b>68</b>	Free delivery on purchases over a certain amount	4.351	4.505	.048*
<b>69</b>	Delivery time frames are provided	4.639	4.742	.036*
<b>70</b>	Complete return policy that is available	4.639	4.763	.020*
<b>71</b>	Product returns that are easy	4.665	4.797	.006*
<b>72</b>	Product returns that are free	4.471	4.634	.020*
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>				
<b>24</b>	Product categorisation that is logical	4.518	4.686	.004**
<b>26</b>	Menu options that are logical (e.g. women –shoes – sneakers)	4.618	4.717	.047*
<b>28</b>	Download speed of pictures	4.219	4.529	.000***
<b>29</b>	Download speed of information	4.241	4.523	.000***
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>				
<b>11</b>	Pictures show various angles of the product	4.319	4.631	.000***
<b>30</b>	Three product views (front, back and side) are available per product	4.157	4.499	.000***
<b>31</b>	Large product views	4.047	4.289	.004**
<b>32</b>	Products are presented in 3D format	3.414	3.668	.015*
<b>35</b>	Availability of a zoom function	4.168	4.434	.000***

Item		Mean(M)	Mean(F)	Sig.
36	Zoom function that shows the type of material of the garment	4.073	4.369	.000***
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>				
5	Hyperlinks that open on another webpage/window	2.916	3.185	.022*
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>				
58	Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer	4.461	4.628	.026*
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>				
2	Website layout that is easy to use	4.628	4.757	.019*
3	Easy to find what I am looking for on the website	4.576	4.723	.013*
8	Visual feel/appearance of the website	4.246	4.394	.035*
9	Website design that is well organised	4.503	4.646	.011*
10	Product pictures are of high quality	4.508	4.683	.005**

\*Significant at the  $p < .05$  level, \*\* Significant at the  $p < .01$  level & \*\*\* Significant at the  $p < .001$  level

Source: Author's own compilation

In terms of statistically significant differences between the genders, several differences were found within the various themes. Overall, as seen in Table 6.26, females in general rated the various items, where significant differences were found ( $p < .05$ ), as more important than their male counterparts did.

In terms of items related to the various themes concerned with "Virtual Layout and Design", females gave more importance to a neutral coloured background, a website that is logically categorised with menu options and quick download speeds, a website that is easy to use, well designed and organised and of high quality, than their male counterparts did (refer to Table 6.26).

Furthermore, females rated the ability to create their own body shape and to mix-and-match items, as well as the availability of various body shapes, display methods and views, and the provision of accurate information and colours significantly higher in terms of importance in comparison with males.

Finally, a secured shopping experience and the use of a website from a credible, well-known e-tailer, as well as factors related to delivery and returns were also rated significantly higher in terms of importance by female respondents.

With regards to packaging, males rated the quality of packaging significantly higher in terms of importance than females did. Interestingly, a significant difference was found between males and females in terms of hyperlinks that open in another page, with males rating this as a less important item (<3) than females (>3). Males thus view this item as significantly less important than their female counterparts.

In line with the above, Table 6.27 provides a breakdown of the significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between males and females on the various online visual merchandising themes.

**Table 6.27: Significant differences between males and females per themes**

Online Visual Merchandising Themes	Mean(M)	Mean(F)	Sig.
<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information</b>	4.421	4.573	.001**
<b>Personalisation</b>	3.562	3.673	.225
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>	3.260	3.288	.715
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	4.604	4.645	.319
<b>Website Advertising</b>	3.801	3.919	.135
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>	3.456	3.962	.000***
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>	4.031	3.961	.348
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>	4.416	4.581	.000***
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>	4.434	4.625	.000***
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>	3.970	4.234	.000***
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>	3.508	3.696	.025*
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	4.001	4.024	.736
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>	4.523	4.639	.005**

\*Significant at the  $p < .05$  level, \*\* Significant at the  $p < .01$  level & \*\*\* Significant at the  $p < .001$  level

Similar findings in terms of statistically significant differences were found overall on the themes, as above (per items in Table 6.26). Females generally rated the themes higher in terms of importance than their male counterparts (see Table 6.27).

Statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) higher mean scores (see Table 6.27) were found for females in relation to the following:

- Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation,
- Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation,
- Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use,
- Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information,
- Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display,
- Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation, and
- Customer Service: Delivery and Returns.

#### **6.3.4.2 *Statistical comparisons based on known vs unknown e-tailer preference***

No statistically significant differences were found with regards to the importance of the themes and items of the various online visual merchandising themes between participants that prefer to shop at a well-known e-tailer as opposed to respondents that prefer to shop at an unknown (less known) e-tailer.

#### **6.3.5 Impact on purchase behaviour**

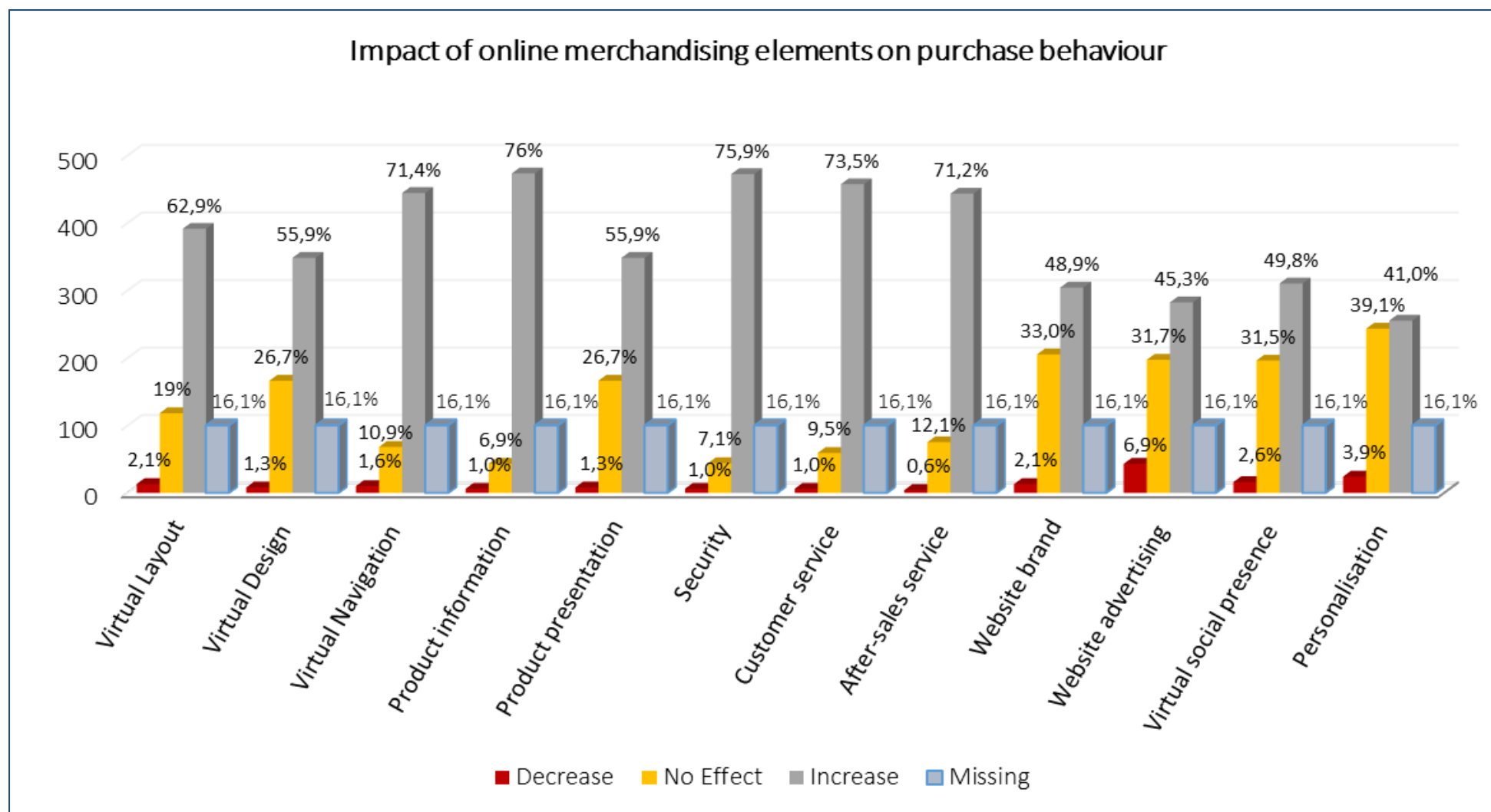
In addition to rating the importance of the various items and online visual merchandising themes, the respondents were also required to rate the provisional defined online visual merchandising themes (derived from the qualitative research) in terms of their effect on online purchasing behaviour on a scale from “1 – decrease purchasing behaviour” to “3 – increase purchasing behaviour”.

Table 6.28 and Figure 6.6 below provide a breakdown of the results.

**Table 6.28: Impact on purchase behaviour mean scores**

<b>Online Visual Merchandising Themes</b>		<b>Mean</b>
<b>1</b>	Product information (price, stock and size information)	2.895
<b>2</b>	Security (safe transactions, protection of personal information)	2.893
<b>3</b>	Customer service (delivery information and cost, website registration, website responsiveness)	2.864
<b>4</b>	After-sales service (product packaging and tracking)	2.841
<b>5</b>	Virtual Navigation (menu options, website quality, user-friendliness)	2.831
<b>6</b>	Virtual Layout (website structure, search tools)	2.724
<b>7</b>	Virtual Design (visual appeal, pictures, colours, font styles)	2.651
<b>8</b>	Product presentation (2D/3D views of pictures, zoom function, body shapes)	2.651
<b>9</b>	Virtual social presence product and customer reviews)	2.563
<b>10</b>	Website brand (image, personality and trust of brand)	2.558
<b>11</b>	Website advertising (online sales promotions)	2.458
<b>12</b>	Personalisation (virtual image consultant and virtual model)	2.443





**Figure 6.6: Impact of online visual merchandising themes on purchasing behaviour**

From Table 6.28 and Figure 6.6 it is clear that the respondents indicated that all the theoretical online visual merchandising themes would increase their online purchasing behaviour with mean scores for all the themes of > 2. Therefore, all the listed online visual merchandising themes are regarded as being important and having an effect on the respondents' purchasing behaviour.

Figure 6.6 and Table 6.28 further indicate that the primary themes that would increase online purchasing behaviour include:

- Product information (price, stock and size information) with a mean score of 2.895,
- Security (safe transactions, protection of personal information) with a mean score of 2.893,
- Customer service (delivery information and cost, website registration, website responsiveness) with a mean score of 2.864,
- After-sales service (product packaging and tracking) with a mean score of 2.841, and
- Virtual navigation (menu options, website quality, user-friendliness) with a mean score of 2.831.

### **6.3.6 Discussion of quantitative findings**

The analysis yielded 13 factors which constitute the proposed framework of conceptual integrated online visual merchandising themes. The extracted themes (factors) were found to be closely related to the provisional conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes, which was established from the preceding qualitative research.

It was found, however, that the statistically derived conceptual integrated framework yielded more specific themes than those that were postulated within the provisional conceptual integrated framework (qualitative research). In essence, the broader themes such as "Product Presentation and Information" and "Virtual Layout and Design" were split into more specific themes relating to specific areas within these broader themes derived from the qualitative research.

Interestingly, two similar themes relating to "Security" emerged from the analyses. Whilst the themes were both constituted from items with similar item content (in terms

of security of information and personal details), the main difference centred on whether the e-tailer was well-known or unknown (less known) and seems to pertain to a hidden aspect of trust. With well-known e-tailers, the fact that the e-tailer has a well-known brand seemingly delivers this variable of trust, whilst if the e-tailer is unknown (less known), respondents require further contact information and information about the e-tailer to ensure this aspect of trust is met.

In terms of reliability, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were all found to be higher than the desired 0.6, and thus all the themes (factors/items) which constitute the proposed conceptual integrated framework of online visual merchandising showed good internal consistency and reliability.

With regards to the relative importance of the various online visual merchandising themes, "Security: Measures and Trust in the Unknown E-tailer and Website" along with "Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use" and "Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation" were found to be the highest ranked themes in terms of relative importance. These were followed closely by "Customer Service: Delivery and Returns" and "Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information".

All the items within the various themes were found to be important with mean ratings >3, with the exception of items 14, 18 and 88. These items could consequently be removed from the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework.

In terms of statistically significant differences between the groups based on gender, females generally rated the items, as well as themes, related to "Product Presentation and Information", "Virtual Layout and Design" and "Customer Service" significantly higher in terms of importance than their male counterparts did. Interestingly, males rated item 5 significantly lower than females did with a mean score < 3, in effect indicating that they do not find this item important.

Finally, with regards to the impact of the online visual merchandising themes, derived from the qualitative research, on purchasing behaviour, the respondents indicated that all the identified themes would increase their online purchasing.

Table 6.29 below provides the outline of the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework developed in the quantitative research. The proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework consists of 13 themes and 82 items (also refer to Appendix J).

**Table 6.29: Proposed conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes**

Main online visual merchandising themes	Items
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Secured shopping experience</li> <li>▪ Personal information is secured</li> <li>▪ A secured website html (https)</li> <li>▪ E-tailer that responds to queries quickly/promptly</li> <li>▪ Detailed information about the e-tailer is provided, if the e-tailer is unknown</li> <li>▪ E-tailer contact information is available</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website layout that is easy to use</li> <li>▪ Easy to find what I am looking for on the website</li> <li>▪ Website design that is basic (not cluttered)</li> <li>▪ Visual feel/appearance of the website</li> <li>▪ Website design that is well organised</li> <li>▪ Product pictures are of high quality</li> <li>▪ Availability of a search function</li> <li>▪ Search function that works well</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Product categorisation that is logical</li> <li>▪ Menu options that are logical (e.g. women –shoes – sneakers)</li> <li>▪ Menu option names are relevant (e.g. women wear, men’s wear)</li> <li>▪ Download speed of pictures</li> <li>▪ Download speed of information</li> </ul>
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Delivery information that is complete</li> <li>▪ Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price</li> <li>▪ Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)</li> <li>▪ Free delivery on purchases over a certain amount</li> <li>▪ Delivery time frames are provided</li> <li>▪ Complete return policy that is available</li> <li>▪ Product returns that are easy</li> <li>▪ Product returns that are free</li> </ul>

Main online visual merchandising themes	Items
<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Info</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Availability of product colour options</li> <li>▪ Product colour options that are available are shown on the garment</li> <li>▪ Product colour is presented accurately</li> <li>▪ Product colour description is detailed</li> <li>▪ Product pictures are clear</li> <li>▪ Detailed size chart that is available</li> <li>▪ Size chart that is available in all conversions (e.g. UK, US, SA)</li> <li>▪ Size chart that is provided when the brand/e-tailer is unknown</li> <li>▪ Prices of products are provided</li> <li>▪ All pricing options are provided per garment size</li> <li>▪ Product availability is indicated</li> </ul>
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pictures show various angles of the product</li> <li>▪ Three product views (front, back and side) are available per product</li> <li>▪ Large product views</li> <li>▪ Products are presented in 3D format</li> <li>▪ Product views can turn 360 degrees</li> <li>▪ Availability of a zoom function</li> <li>▪ Zoom function that shows the type of material of the garment</li> </ul>
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer</li> <li>▪ Login with details (username and password) are required</li> <li>▪ Saving of credit card details is optional</li> <li>▪ Detailed information, such as copyright and date of registration of the website</li> <li>▪ E-tailer's brand is well-known</li> </ul>
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Product packaging in general represents the e-tailer</li> <li>▪ Quality of product packaging</li> <li>▪ E-tailer's brand image is good</li> <li>▪ E-tailer/website brand image is well-designed</li> <li>▪ Personality of the website brand is inviting (nice to browse)</li> </ul>
<b>Website Advertising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online promotion events (specials) that are available</li> </ul>

Main online visual merchandising themes	Items
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To be notified about an online sale</li> <li>▪ To be notified about an online sale via email</li> <li>▪ General reviews of the e-tailer's website</li> </ul>
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human models are used</li> <li>▪ Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)</li> <li>▪ Availability of various body shapes</li> <li>▪ Products are presented on each type of body shape</li> <li>▪ Ability to select your size on the body shape</li> <li>▪ Ability to select your height on the body shape</li> </ul>
<b>Personalisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assistance/advice given by the e-tailer on the website about product colours, styles, and so forth.</li> <li>▪ Ability to communicate with an online image consultant</li> <li>▪ Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website</li> <li>▪ Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hyperlinks that are available</li> <li>▪ Hyperlinks that open on another webpage/window</li> <li>▪ Hyperlinks on the website take me to the right place</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Background colour that is neutral</li> <li>▪ Background colour that complements the product</li> <li>▪ Font colour that is neutral</li> <li>▪ Font colour that complements the picture</li> <li>▪ Font colour that complements the background colour</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own compilation

The proposed and developed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework (firstly developed in the qualitative research in Part 1, and then further developed in the quantitative research in Part 2 of the study) as shown in Table 6.29 needs to be tested further in a future study (this did not form part of the objectives of this study). The framework should be tested on a specific e-tailer to test the conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes to determine if this conceptual integrated framework will in fact increase online trust, and in turn, influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

The following section provides a summary of the chapter.

## **6.4 SUMMARY**

The primary aim of the Part 1 of the empirical study (quantitative research) was to statistically determine the underlying conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes. In addition, the relative importance of each of the identified themes, which constitute the conceptual integrated framework, was investigated, and the effect of the online visual merchandising themes (derived during Part 2, the qualitative research) on purchasing behaviour was examined.

A proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework consisting of 13 online visual merchandising themes was delineated, and the relative importance of each of these themes was determined. In addition, the online visual merchandising themes that were derived during the qualitative research were all found to have a positive effect on online purchasing behaviour.

The final conclusions and recommendations made for this study will be discussed next in Chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 7:**

# **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Reflecting on the previous chapters, Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research study. A detailed background discussion into the South African retail and e-tail industry and visual merchandising was given, which gave rise to the purpose of the research, the research question and objectives of the study. It became evident during the scrutinising of the literature that a conceptual integrated framework containing online visual merchandising themes that apparel e-tailers could use when developing an e-store to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour, was lacking. The proposed methodology was discussed with the aim of closing the identified gap in the literature, as stated in the purpose of the study (Section 1.4).

Chapter 2 provided an in-depth discussion into the e-tail environment. The different e-tailing formats were identified and discussed, followed by the advantages and disadvantages of e-tailing for both the e-tailer and the consumer. The various risks associated with online purchasing were identified, followed by a discussion of how to increase online trust which could lead to loyalty, and ultimately, to increased online purchasing. The reasons why South African consumers are for and against online purchasing were identified, as well as the types of products that consumers are purchasing online. Chapter 2 concluded with a brief overview of an e-tail strategy.

Chapter 3 focused on an in-depth discussion of online visual merchandising. The chapter started with a brief discussion of visual merchandising for brick-and-mortar stores, including the established visual merchandising themes for brick-and-mortar stores. The similarities between apparel brick-and-mortar and e-store visual merchandising were identified, followed by a discussion of the challenges experienced by apparel e-tailers. The identified online visual merchandising themes in the existing body of knowledge were identified and scrutinised in detail. The themes that overlapped were eliminated and grouped into similar main themes (see Section 3.6). The identified online visual merchandising themes derived from the literature were used as the basis for the qualitative research conducted in the empirical study. The chapter concluded with a discussion of e-store design.

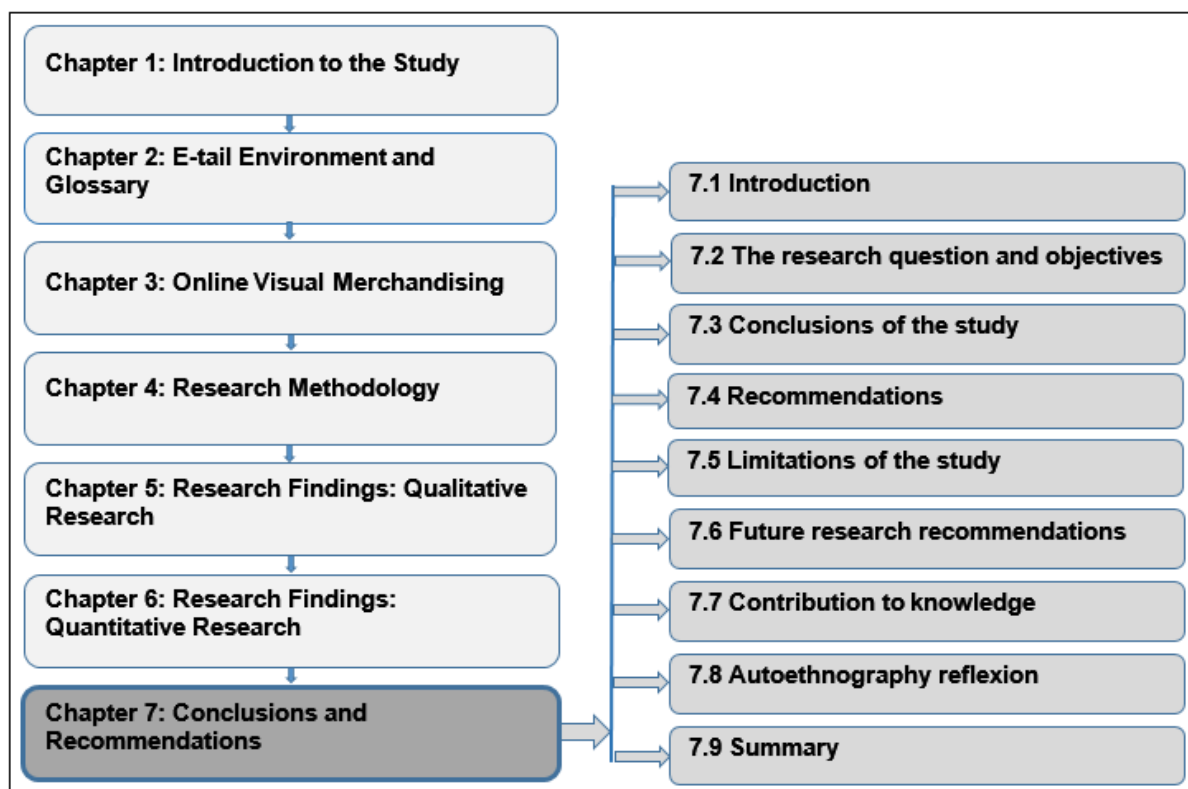


Chapter 4 provided a detailed discussion of the research methodology for the study as proposed in Chapter 1. The research paradigm was explained followed by the research process that was designed and implemented with the aim of achieving the set objectives, as stated in Chapter 1. The research process shed light on the mixed-method approach that was followed. The research instrument, the sampling method, the data collection and data analysis for both part of the empirical study (qualitative and quantitative) were described in detail. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the rigour and ethical procedures applied in the study.

The empirical findings of the study were discussed and presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 presented a discussion of the findings of Part 1 (the qualitative research) of the empirical study, and Chapter 6 presented a discussion of the findings of Part 2 (the quantitative research) of the empirical study, based on the research objectives as stipulated in Chapters 1 and 4. The findings obtained in Part 1 (the qualitative research) were presented, supported and discussed by direct quotations, tables and figures. Similarly, the findings obtained in Part 2 (the quantitative research) were presented and supported by tables and figures. The findings obtained in Chapters 5 and 6 provided the foundation for the final chapter of this research study, Chapter 7, which presents the final conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Chapter 7 commences with a brief overview of the research question and objectives, as previously discussed in Chapters 1, 4 and 5. A short overall conclusion for each part of the study (literature study, the qualitative research and the quantitative research) is made, followed by the final conclusions of the study, based on each secondary objective, followed by a discussion of the recommendations. The limitations experienced in this study are presented, followed by future research recommendations. Thereafter the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge is discussed and lastly, the chapter concludes with a self-reflection with regards to the PhD journey, namely, an autoethnography reflection.

Figure 7.1 depicts the overall layout of the study, including where Chapter 7 fits in and the layout of Chapter 7.



**Figure 7.1: Structure of Chapter 7**

As depicted in Figure 7.1, the research question and objectives are discussed next.

## **7.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES**

The research question and objectives of this study, as outlined in Chapters 1, 4 and 5, are revisited below.

### **7.2.1 The research question**

The research question derived from the preliminary literature review was stated as follows: Apparel retailers use visual merchandising themes for various reasons, such as to enhance the overall shopping experience and to display and promote the apparel items in a visually appealing manner to generate interest and ultimately sales; can apparel e-tailers use the online visual merchandising themes to the same effect? From the research question, specific primary and secondary objectives were derived.

### **7.2.2 The primary objective**

The primary research objective of the study is to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that can be used by apparel e-tailers in South Africa to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

### **7.2.3 The secondary objectives**

The secondary objectives as derived from the primary objective are as follows:

- 1) to identify visual merchandising themes that need to be incorporated into an online visual merchandising framework from a consumer's perspective;
- 2) to determine the factors that decrease the likelihood of consumers purchasing online;
- 3) to determine the reasons why consumers are purchasing online;
- 4) to develop an online visual merchandising framework containing concepts based on the identified online visual merchandising themes;
- 5) to determine the relationships (propositions) among the conceptual framework constructs; and
- 6) to identify areas for future research.

Each secondary objective was numbered in the list above to make the reporting on each secondary objective easier in Section 7.3.

The following section provides the conclusions that have been made for the study.

## **7.3 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

The conclusions of the study are based on the information that was derived firstly, from the detailed literature study conducted in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, and secondly, from both empirical studies, namely the qualitative and the quantitative research.

All the information that was gathered aimed to address the research objectives, as stipulated above and in Chapters 1, 4 and 5. The overall findings obtained in the literature study and both the empirical studies (qualitative and quantitative) will be summarised. Thereafter each secondary objective of this study will be addressed, based on the findings obtained in Chapters 3, 5 and 6.

After the discussion of the secondary objectives, the primary objective of the study will be discussed, and the researcher will address the research question of the study, as stipulated in Chapters 1, 4 and 5.

### **7.3.1 Overall findings**

The overall findings obtained in the literature study, and in Part 1, the qualitative study, and Part 2, the quantitative study, are briefly summarised below.

#### **7.3.1.1 Findings: Literature study**

A detailed literature review was conducted in Chapters 1 to 4, and included various theoretical sources such as academic articles, textbooks, Internet searches and database searches, including Google Scholar, Emerald, Elsevier, EBSCOhost and Science Direct. An extensive content analysis was done, where all possible research studies on the topic in the literature domain were analysed and compared to ensure that all online visual merchandising themes had been identified, and that any duplicate themes were removed. From the literature, 12 main online visual merchandising themes were identified, each with various categories that make up the main themes (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6, and Table 3.1).

After the data had been organised into the 12 themes, the themes and categories were reviewed to ensure that the data was categorised correctly. This meant that all the themes and categories were reviewed again to determine whether some of the themes or categories could be merged or replaced by others. A total of 12 online visual merchandising themes and 84 categories were identified from the literature review. The identified list of online visual merchandising themes, including their categories, can be viewed in Appendix E.

#### **7.3.1.2 Findings: Part 1 - Qualitative research**

The first part of the empirical study referred to the qualitative research, which centred on the further identification and delineation of the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers in South Africa. The aim was to explore and gain insight into the opinions of online apparel consumers regarding the existing online visual merchandising themes (that had been identified in the literature study and grouped into 12 themes and 84 categories) used by apparel e-stores, as well as the identification of any additional online visual merchandising themes that could possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

Data for the qualitative research was gathered from four semi-structured focus group interviews regarding the existing online visual merchandising themes used on apparel

e-stores as identified from the literature (see Appendix E). After the focus group discussion, the participants were requested to complete a short survey questionnaire, and thereafter, the participants were asked to rate the various online visual merchandising themes in terms of importance using a card sorting method.

From the data obtained in the qualitative part of the study, it was evident that the primary reasons associated with shopping online centred on convenience and the availability of a wider range of products. Furthermore, it was evident that the main themes identified by participants which would influence their online shopping included, but were not limited to, website navigation, virtual layout and design, security, product presentation/display and product information.

An important additional online visual merchandising theme that was identified by the participants was the possibility of a virtual image consultant function and/or a virtual image model, which is confirmed by the findings obtained from Park *et al.* (2009:918). This additional theme essentially involves a function on the e-store that either provides assistance in terms of suggesting, matching and compiling outfits for consumers, or where consumers are given the ability/option of building a virtual model of themselves on the e-store by giving their specific measurements and body type to enable them to get a clearer picture of how products and items would fit and suit them.

It was clear from the perceptions of the participants that the theoretically derived list of online visual merchandising themes stemming from the literature (Appendix E) was not as clearly delineated as expected. Whilst the theoretically derived list stemming from the literature, which was used for the focus group interviews, clearly delineates certain main themes consisting of several categories, the participants did not always make the same distinctions.

To this end, it was important to propose and delineate a simplified provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, which takes the theoretically identified online visual merchandising themes, as well as the findings from the focus group discussions, short survey questionnaire and card sorting exercise, into account (Appendix H). The aim of the provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework was to provide a robust, initial framework that would form the baseline for the quantitative section, and which would allow the study to quantitatively test the provisional framework among South African online apparel

consumers. The findings obtained in the qualitative part of this study yielded nine main themes with a total of 42 categories (see Appendix H).

#### **7.3.1.3 Findings: Quantitative section**

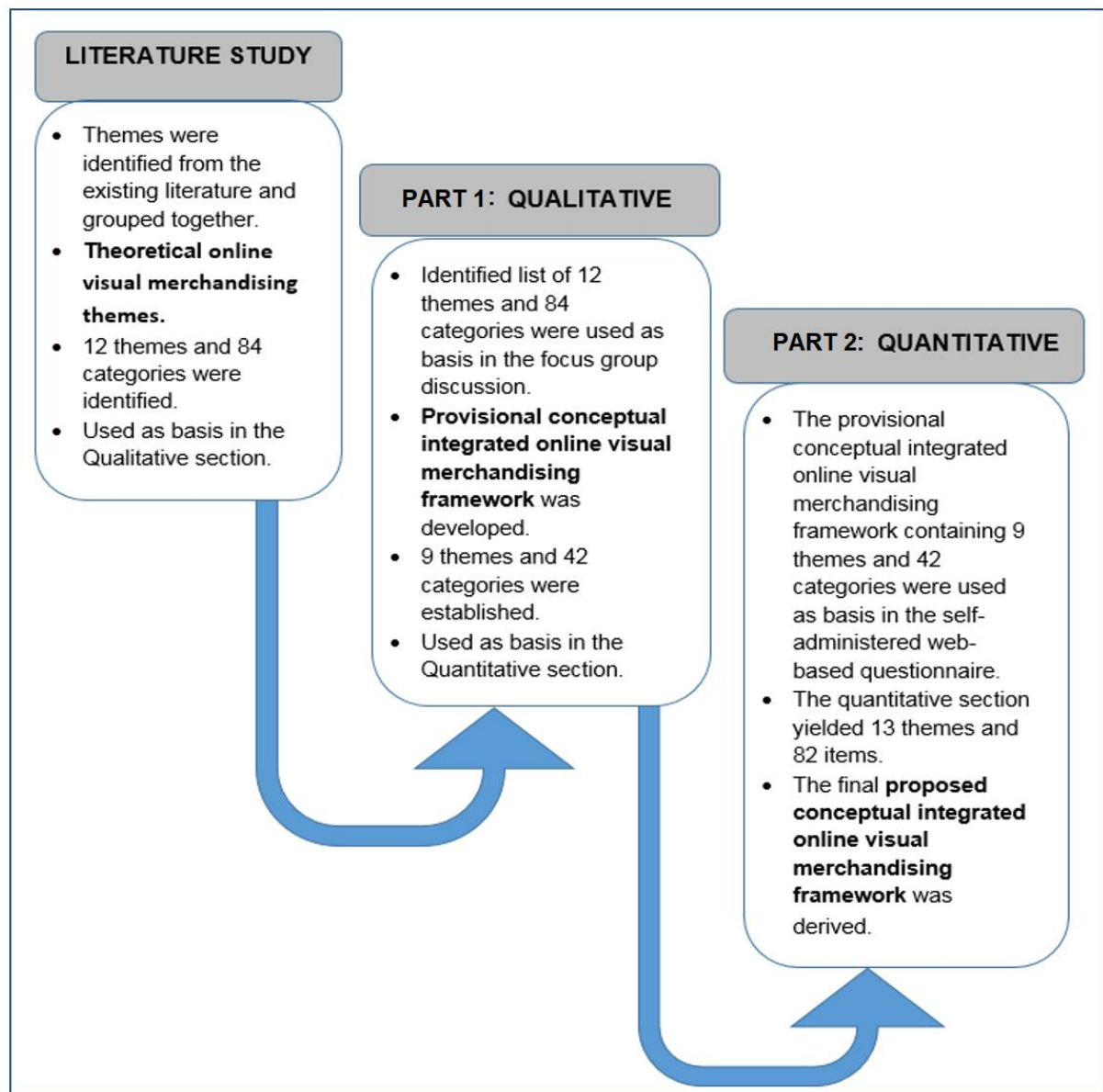
The second part of the empirical study consisted of the quantitative research. The provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework (Appendix H) that was developed in Part 1 of the study, was used as the basis for the development of a self-administered web-based questionnaire which aimed to measure the various online visual merchandising themes.

An analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires produced 13 factors, which established the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising themes framework. The extracted themes (factors) were found to be closely related to the provisional conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes which was established in Part 1 of the research. It was found, however, that the statistically-derived conceptual integrated framework yielded more specific themes than those that were postulated within the provisional conceptual integrated framework (outcome of the qualitative research).

The collected data further revealed that the highest ranked online visual merchandising themes in terms of relative importance were, “Security: Measures and Trust in the Unknown E-tailer and Website” along with “Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use” and “Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation”. These were followed closely by “Customer Service: Delivery and Returns” and “Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information”. With regards to the impact of the online visual merchandising themes (derived from the qualitative research) on purchasing behaviour, respondents indicated that all the identified themes would increase their online purchasing.

The final proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework developed during the quantitative section of the empirical study yielded 13 main themes and 82 items (refer to Appendix J). This proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework needs to be tested in future on a specific apparel e-tailer to determine if the proposed conceptual framework would possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

Figure 7.2 provides an illustration of how the overall findings obtained from the literature study, as well as both parts of the empirical study (qualitative and quantitative) of this study were used to create the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework.



**Figure 7.2: Summary illustration of the overall findings**

Source: Author's own compilation

The following sections provide conclusions of the study per each secondary objective individually.

### 7.3.2 Secondary objective 1

The first secondary objective, as outlined above in Section 7.2.3 and in Chapters 1, 4 and 5, was “to identify visual merchandising themes that need to be incorporated into an online visual merchandising framework from a consumer’s perspective”.

Secondary objective 1 was addressed firstly through a detailed literature study of the existing online visual merchandising themes (refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.6, and secondly, through the qualitative research that made use of the list of themes derived from the literature (refer to Chapter 5).

With regards to the literature study, a detailed content analysis was conducted, where all possible research studies on the topic in the literature domain were analysed and compared to ensure that all duplicate online visual merchandising themes were removed. From the literature study, 12 online visual merchandising themes were identified, each with various categories that make up the themes (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6).

After the data had been organised into themes and categories, the themes and categories were reviewed to ensure that the data was categorised correctly. This meant that all the themes and categories were reviewed again to determine whether some of the themes or categories could be merged together. A total of 12 online visual merchandising themes and 84 categories were identified from the literature review, as shown in Table 7.1 below.

**Table 7.1: Theoretical online visual merchandising themes**

<b>1. Virtual layout and design</b>	
1.	Website structure/layout
2.	Navigation design (may contain bars, hyperlinks, image maps, drop-down menus, collapsible menus and search options)
3.	Web design
4.	Website’s visual appeal
5.	Web functionality
6.	Website geometry
<b>2. Website content</b>	
7.	Information provided



8. Content quality: information provided and completeness of thereof
9. Time (quick and easy to work)
10. Specific content quality: ability to find specific details and appearance
11. Information content

### **3. Website navigation**

12. Search engine, tool or function
13. Categorisation of items
14. Availability of related website link and category link
15. Sitemap is given
16. Logical menu options
17. Website quality - Technical adequacy: appropriate technologies (ease of navigation, downloading speed and links) are used on the website

### **4. Virtual atmospherics (sight & sound)**

18. Music (background music)
19. Videos
20. Pictures/photos/graphics used to display items
21. Colour:- background colours, colours surrounding the products, percentage of white space
22. Fonts used
23. Font colours used

### **5. Product presentation / Presentation technique**

24. Types of product view (front view, back vies, side view)
25. Presentation methods/format (2D and 3D)
26. Detailed views/ Image focus views by zooming in on products (image enlargement)
27. Colour and fabric swatch
28. Colour presentation (various colour options are given under the picture)
29. Mix-and-match/garment coordination
30. Human models are used to display clothing
31. Mannequins are used to display clothing
32. Flat surfaces are used to display clothing
33. Hangers are used to display clothing

- 34. Videos are used to display clothing
- 35. Whole view of human model or mannequin available
- 36. Availability of various body shapes
- 37. Location of an image (top left, centre, right)
- 38. The number of pictorial images
- 39. Product density
- 40. Image quality and size

#### **6. Product information**

- 41. Detailed size indication/measurement explanation
- 42. Textiles/material image (fabric swatch)
- 43. Fibre content composition indication
- 44. Sewing quality indication
- 45. Price indication
- 46. Colour information offer (colour chip, colour image and written indication, colour image)
- 47. Product stock indication
- 48. Garment coordination (mix-and-match options)
- 49. Manufacture place indication
- 50. Product comparison information
- 51. Garment details

#### **7. Virtual theatrics**

- 52. Animation techniques
- 53. Fun (fun to shop at this website)
- 54. Inviting
- 55. Excitement
- 56. Vividness (media richness)

#### **8. Virtual social presence**

- 57. Communities (active online community that enables consumers to interact with each other)
- 58. Communication
- 59. Recommendations (recommendations made by web-based systems or visitors of the site towards shoppers that are not sure what they are looking for)

60. Avatars
61. Real-time interaction forums
62. Blogs
63. Social media
64. Crowding
65. Interaction tool
<b>9. Customer service</b>
66. Responsiveness
67. Shipping costs and information
68. Willingness to help
69. Timely responses
70. Problem solving
71. Delivery terms indication
72. Return policy indication
73. Selling agency/organisation/e-tailer information
74. Custom-made service
75. Registration requirements
76. E-store events
<b>10. Security</b>
77. Privacy is protected
78. Safe transactions
79. Trust
80. Security
<b>11. Web advertising</b>
81. Sale/promotion/advertising signage
<b>12. Website brand</b>
82. Image of website
83. Personality refers to the mental presentation of a website
84. The brand ensures trust and reduces perceived risk

Source: Author's own compilation

The identified list of existing online visual merchandising themes, as shown in Table 7.1 above, was derived from the literature study conducted in Chapter 3 and it was used as basis for the qualitative research done in Part 1 of the study.

The qualitative research conducted in Part 1 centred on the further identification and delineation of the online visual merchandising themes for apparel e-tailers in South Africa. The findings obtained from the focus group discussions, as well as from the short survey questionnaire and the card sorting activity were all taken into account and combined with a particular focus on the themes which were identified as important and as having a definite influence on the increased likelihood of purchasing online. All this allowed the study to put forward a provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework.

The aim of the provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework was to provide a robust, initial framework that would form the basis for a comprehensive framework that could be used by apparel e-tailers to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. The 12 theoretical themes and 84 categories identified in the literature study (as shown in Table 7.1) were reduced to nine themes with a total of 42 categories during the qualitative research (as shown in Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 below shows the outline of the provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that was developed during the qualitative research.

**Table 7.2: Provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework**

<b>1. Virtual Layout, Design &amp; Navigation</b>	
1.	Website structure, layout and geometric
2.	Navigation design
3.	Website design and visual appeal
4.	Pictures
5.	Background colour
6.	Text style and colour
7.	Font colour
8.	Search engine tools
9.	Categorisation of items
10.	Logical menu options
11.	Website quality/ functionality
12.	Quick and easy to work website

<b>2. Product Information and Presentation</b>
13. Type of product views and presentation (2D/3D) 14. Zoom function 15. Colour presentation and information 16. Human models 17. Various body shapes 18. Product density 19. Image quality and size 20. Detailed size indication 21. Price indication 22. Product stock indication
<b>3. Security</b>
23. Protection of privacy 24. Safe transactions 25. Ability to trust website 26. Incorporated security features
<b>4. Customer Service</b>
27. Responsiveness and willingness to help 28. Shipping cost and information 29. Delivery terms indication 30. Return policy indication 31. Registration requirements 32. Content quality (completeness of information)
<b>5. After-sales Service</b>
33. Product packaging 34. Product tracking
<b>6. Website Brand</b>
35. Image and personality 36. Trust in brand
<b>7. Website Advertising</b>
37. Online sale promotions/advertising 38. E-store events
<b>8. Virtual Social Presence</b>
39. Product reviews/general customer reviews 40. E-tailer contact information/interaction tool

9. Personalisation
41. Virtual image consultant 42. Virtual model

Source: Author's own compilation

Secondary objective 1 was therefore achieved through the compilation of the provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework consisting of nine themes and 42 categories, which stemmed from the qualitative section of the empirical study. The provisional conceptual integrated framework compiled from the qualitative research (9 themes and 42 categories) was further used as basis for the quantitative section of the empirical study to quantitatively test the identified themes among South African online apparel consumers.

### 7.3.3 Secondary objective 2

The second secondary objective, as outlined above in Section 7.2.3 and in Chapters 1, 4 and 5 was “to determine the factors that decrease the likelihood of consumers purchasing online”.

Secondary objective 2 was addressed through the qualitative section of the empirical study, where the participants were asked in the focus group discussion about the factors that decrease their likelihood of purchasing apparel items online. From the four focus group discussions, a number of factors were identified which were grouped into four main themes, together with a few categories per theme, relating to the reasons as to why the participants do not purchase or partake in online shopping activities.

The first theme referred to the overall size description of items that are a problem. The participants indicated that no clear size measurements or charts have a negative influence on their purchasing behaviour, especially if the sizes are given in other than South African measurements. The participants also indicated that they would prefer a detailed measurement size chart showing the exact centimetre measurement per size, as it is not possible to fit the merchandise. The problem relating to a detailed size chart and the lack of being able to try on merchandise was confirmed in literature by various authors (Holmes, 2014:3; Kawaf & Tagg, 2012:3; Park *et al.*, 2009:918; Kim & Lennon, 2009:413; Kakimdjanova & Park, 2005:308).

The second theme identified by participants referred to the return policies that are not clearly explained. Insufficient information regarding the e-tailer's return policy, especially in terms of how the item(s) should be returned, how much time is available before the item(s) have to be returned, and if any costs are involved from the purchaser's side in returning the items, were all important factors according to the participants which decreased their likelihood of making a purchase. It was clear from the focus group discussions that the participants regard the convenience of purchasing online as an important factor, and the moment that the participants feel that the e-tailer's return policy is not convenient to them, they will not partake in the online purchase. These findings were in line with that of Kawaf and Tagg (2012:3), namely, that the moment that the challenges regarding the returning of merchandise becomes cumbersome, then consumers are less inclined to purchase from that e-tailer.

The third theme identified by participants referred to the delivery of items in general. The participants indicated that if the delivery period takes too long and if the delivery fee was too high, then they will not purchase from that e-tailer. The participants indicated that they prefer not to pay for delivery, however, they are prepared to rather spend a threshold amount, for example "spend up to R500 to receive free delivery", than to pay a delivery fee. Kawaf and Tagg (2012:3) confirmed this finding as they indicated that having to pay for the delivery of items is regarded as an obstacle for consumers.

The fourth and last theme identified by participants referred to the online payment options available online, and which in general do not seem to be safe to use. All the participants in the focus groups were extremely concerned with the security of paying online, as also confirmed by Goldstuck (in Writer, 2015a). It was also evident from the discussions that if there were no additional payment options, such as EFT or PayPal available, then they would be hesitant to purchase from that e-tailer, especially if the e-tailer is unknown or less known, and also if the currency value is not showing in South African rand. Similarly, Harding (2015:1) indicated that consumers do not trust online payment systems, and therefore it is critical that payment options, such as EFT and PayPal, need to be an alternative option for purchasers to use. The participants further mentioned that if they experienced any difficulties regarding the payment method on the e-store, they would leave the e-store immediately.

Secondary objective 2 was therefore achieved through the identification of the four themes that could have an impact on decreasing the likelihood of consumers purchasing apparel-related products online. Refer to Chapter 5, Section 5.5.3.1 for a complete discussion of the findings obtained.

#### **7.3.4 Secondary objective 3**

The third secondary objective, as outlined above in Section 7.2.3 and in Chapters 1, 4 and 5, was “to determine the reasons why consumers are purchasing online”.

Secondary objective 3 was addressed through both the qualitative and quantitative sections of the empirical study. In the qualitative research (refer to Chapter 5, Section 5.5.3.3) the participants were asked in the focus group discussion regarding the factors or reasons that increase their likelihood of purchasing apparel items online. From the four focus group discussions, two main reasons became evident. The first reason why participants shop online for apparel-related products is due to the convenience thereof. The participants highlighted that they can shop from the comfort of their own home without having to go to the shops; the time convenience of shopping online, as shopping can occur during any time of the day or night; and the ability to easily browse and identify the available products/items. Correspondingly, Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244) confirmed this statement, namely, that a major advantage of shopping online is the convenience thereof.

The second reason why the participants shop for apparel-related products online is due to the perception of a greater variety and availability of products online, which was also confirmed by Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244). The participants mentioned that it is easy to identify the availability of products online, products which might not always be available in-store. Participants are also of the opinion that online shopping gives an individual access to a wider range and variety of products than shopping in-store.

The findings obtained in Part 2, the quantitative section of the empirical study, revealed and supported the findings obtained in Part 1, the qualitative part, and therefore addressed objective 3. The respondents were asked in the self-administered web-based questionnaire (see Appendix I, Question 4 and Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3) to select, from a pre-determined list, all the possible reasons why they shop for apparel-related products online. Respondents could also select an “other” option and then



specify the reason for the “other” option, if the option was not included in the list. It was found that the main reasons why respondents prefer to shop for apparel-related products online were mainly due to:

- Convenience
- 24/7 access to shopping
- Quick to browse online
- The ease of comparing prices

These reasons were all confirmed by the research done by Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244). Furthermore, the reasons offered by respondents under the “other” option were mainly focused on convenience, the wider variety of apparel-related products and wider availability of apparel-related products.

Secondary objective 3 was achieved, as it was evident from both the qualitative and quantitative sections of the study that the main reason why participants and respondents purchase apparel-related products online is due to the convenience thereof.

#### **7.3.5 Secondary objective 4**

The fourth secondary objective, as outlined above in Section 7.2.3 and in Chapters 1, 4 and 5, was “to develop an online visual merchandising framework containing concepts based on the identified online visual merchandising themes”.

Secondary objective 4 was addressed through Part 2, the quantitative section, of the empirical study. As previously indicated, the online visual merchandising themes identified from the literature and discussed among the focus groups in Part 1 of the empirical study, were used as the basis for the quantitative research done in Part 2 of the empirical study.

The provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework (developed during Part 1 of the study) postulated nine online visual merchandising themes with 42 categories, which were converted into a five-point Likert scale, consisting of 95 items, which measured the various important online visual merchandising themes. (Refer to Appendix I, question 5 in the self-administered web-based questionnaire for the 95-item Likert scale.)

The data obtained in question 5 was analysed through common factor analyses using the principal axis factoring method (refer to Sections 6.2.4 and 6.3.1 for a complete discussion of the data analysis). The analysis generated 13 factors which constitute the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising themes framework.

The extracted themes (factors) were found to be closely related to the provisional conceptual integrated framework for online visual merchandising themes, which was established from the preceding Part 1 of the empirical study. It was found, however, that the statistically derived conceptual integrated framework yielded more specific themes than those that were postulated within the provisional conceptual integrated framework that derived from the qualitative research.

In essence, the broader theme, namely “Product Information and Presentation” was divided into three more specific themes, namely:

- Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation & Information
- Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display
- Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation

The same applied to the theme “Virtual Layout and Design”, which was divided into four themes, namely:

- Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal
- Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation
- Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation
- Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use

Similarly, the theme “Security” was also divided into two more specific themes, namely:

- Security: Measures and Trust in the Unknown E-tailer and Website
- Security: Measures and Trust in the Well-Known E-tailer & Website

Therefore, the final proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework developed from Part 1, the quantitative section of the empirical study, are summarised in Table 7.3 below. The framework consists of 13 themes and 82 items.

**Table 7.3: Proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework**

Main online visual merchandising themes	Items
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Secured shopping experience</li> <li>▪ Personal information is secured</li> <li>▪ A secured website html (https)</li> <li>▪ E-tailer that responds to queries quickly/promptly</li> <li>▪ Detailed information about the e-tailer is provided, if the e-tailer is unknown</li> <li>▪ E-tailer contact information is available</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website layout that is easy to use</li> <li>▪ Easy to find what I am looking for on the website</li> <li>▪ Website design that is basic (not cluttered)</li> <li>▪ Visual feel/appearance of the website</li> <li>▪ Website design that is well organised</li> <li>▪ Product pictures are of high quality</li> <li>▪ Availability of a search function</li> <li>▪ Search function that works well</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Product categorisation that is logical</li> <li>▪ Menu options that are logical (e.g. women –shoes – sneakers)</li> <li>▪ Menu option names are relevant (e.g. women wear, men’s wear)</li> <li>▪ Download speed of pictures</li> <li>▪ Download speed of information</li> </ul>
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Delivery information that is complete</li> <li>▪ Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price</li> <li>▪ Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)</li> <li>▪ Free delivery on purchases over a certain amount</li> <li>▪ Delivery time frames are provided</li> <li>▪ Complete return policy that is available</li> <li>▪ Product returns that are easy</li> <li>▪ Product returns that are free</li> </ul>

<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Info</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Availability of product colour options</li> <li>▪ Product colour options that are available are shown on the garment</li> <li>▪ Product colour is presented accurately</li> <li>▪ Product colour description is detailed</li> <li>▪ Product pictures are clear</li> <li>▪ Detailed size chart that is available</li> <li>▪ Size chart that is available in all conversions (e.g. UK, US, SA)</li> <li>▪ Size chart that is provided when the brand/e-tailer is unknown</li> <li>▪ Prices of products are provided</li> <li>▪ All pricing options are provided per garment size</li> <li>▪ Product availability is indicated</li> </ul>
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pictures show various angles of the product</li> <li>▪ Three product views (front, back and side) are available per product</li> <li>▪ Large product views</li> <li>▪ Products are presented in 3D format</li> <li>▪ Product views can turn 360 degrees</li> <li>▪ Availability of a zoom function</li> <li>▪ Zoom function that shows the type of material of the garment</li> </ul>
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer</li> <li>▪ Login with details (username and password) are required</li> <li>▪ Saving of credit card details is optional</li> <li>▪ Detailed information, such as copyright and date of registration of the website</li> <li>▪ E-tailer's brand is well-known</li> </ul>
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Product packaging in general represents the e-tailer</li> <li>▪ Quality of product packaging</li> <li>▪ E-tailer's brand image is good</li> <li>▪ E-tailer/website brand image is well-designed</li> <li>▪ Personality of the website brand is inviting (nice to browse)</li> </ul>
<b>Website Advertising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online promotion events (specials) that are available</li> <li>▪ To be notified about an online sale</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To be notified about an online sale via email</li> <li>▪ General reviews of the e-tailer's website</li> </ul>
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human models are used</li> <li>▪ Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)</li> <li>▪ Availability of various body shapes</li> <li>▪ Products are presented on each type of body shape</li> <li>▪ Ability to select your size on the body shape</li> <li>▪ Ability to select your height on the body shape</li> </ul>
<b>Personalisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assistance/advice given by the e-tailer on the website about product colours, styles and so forth.</li> <li>▪ Ability to communicate with an online image consultant</li> <li>▪ Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website</li> <li>▪ Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hyperlinks that are available</li> <li>▪ Hyperlinks that open on another webpage/window</li> <li>▪ Hyperlinks on the website take me to the right place</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Background colour that is neutral</li> <li>▪ Background colour that complements the product</li> <li>▪ Font colour that is neutral</li> <li>▪ Font colour that complements the picture</li> <li>▪ Font colour that complements the background colour</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own compilation

In essence, secondary objective 4 was achieved through the final proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework consisting of 13 themes and 82 items, as shown in Table 7.3 above (also refer to Appendix J and Chapter 6, Section 6.3.6).

### 7.3.6 Secondary objective 5

The fifth secondary objective, as outlined above in Section 7.2.3 and in Chapters 1, 4 and 5, was “to determine the relationships (propositions) among conceptual framework constructs”.

Secondary objective 5 was addressed through Part 2, the quantitative section of the empirical study. In order to determine the relationships (propositions) among the conceptual framework constructs, the relative importance of each of the online visual merchandising themes was calculated. (Refer to Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2 and Table 6.24 for the rankings per theme.)

Table 7.4 below shows the online visual merchandising themes as identified by the respondents in ranking order of importance.

**Table 7.4: Online visual merchandising themes ranked as per order of importance**

Online Visual Merchandising Themes	Ranking
Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website	1
Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use	2
Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation	3
Customer Service: Delivery and Returns	4
Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information	5
Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation	6
Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website	7
Website and E-tailer Brand	8
Website Advertising	9
Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display	10
Personalisation	11
Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation	12
Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal	13

Source: Author's own compilation

It is clear from Table 7.4, that the theme “Security: Measures and Trust in the *Unknown* E-tailer and Website” was found to be the most important online visual merchandising

theme. This theme refers mainly to detailed e-tailer information that should be available, especially if the e-tailer is unknown (less known or not very familiar to consumers) and for consumers wanting an overall secured shopping experience. Interestingly, the most important and also the highest ranked items also came from this theme, which highlighted the fact that consumers' personal information should be secured, followed by an overall secured shopping experience. This theme is therefore very important and in line with what Chang and Chen (2008:819) said that consumers do not like to deal with unknown e-tailers, as consumers are more concerned about their privacy and are less likely to trust them. Consumers want to know that the e-tailer is a reputable one and that their privacy is protected (Ha & Stoel, 2011:205).

The second most important theme was "Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use". This theme emphasises the overall importance of the visual appearance of the e-store that should enable the shoppers to easily find what they are looking for. This includes the availability of a search function that contributes to a quick and easy search on the e-store, and which leads to the overall convenience of shopping online. Park *et al.* (2009:920) similarly mentioned that e-stores that have effective search tools provide convenience for consumers, as less time is spent on searching for the right product. Furthermore, Ha *et al.* (2007:484) said that a search function is regarded as an important tool, as it can structure a shopper's search and can facilitate finding the desired merchandise, therefore, shoppers regard it as a desirable e-store feature.

The theme "Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation" was regarded as the third most important theme. This theme emphasises the fact that both information and pictures should have an acceptable download speed, and that the way in which products are categorised should be logical. The overall virtual navigation on an e-store, according to Gatautis and Vaiciukvnaite (2013:539), plays an extremely important role. Ha *et al.* (2007:485) indicated that the convenience related to how the merchandise categories are presented is likely to influence the shopper's product search path and purchase intention.

The fourth ranked online visual merchandising theme was "Customer Service: Delivery and Returns". This theme refers to the delivery of products in general, especially with regards to the payment of delivery and the delivery information. It was clear that the respondents want free delivery, but that they are prepared to pay a small fee of less

than R50 for delivery, and that they would rather spend more to obtain free delivery. According to Kawaf and Tagg (2012:3), consumers regard the fact that they have to pay for the delivery of items as an obstacle. According to a study conducted by Ha and Stoel (2011:205), it was evident that consumers are satisfied to pay a delivery fee, as long as it is a reasonable fee. This theme also incorporated information regarding the return policy. It was evident that the method of returning products should be easy and it also should be free of charge. The findings are in line with that of Kawaf and Tagg (2012:3) that as soon as the return of merchandise becomes cumbersome, consumers are less inclined to purchase from that e-tailer. Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244) similarly mentioned that inconvenient return policies are regarded as an obstacle for online shoppers.

“Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Information” was rated as the fifth most important theme, according to the respondents. This theme highlights the fact that the e-store should contain all the important information regarding the product. Park *et al.* (2009:917) confirmed that information content plays an important role in building consumer trust, as it will replace the salesperson and the physical surroundings of the brick-and-mortar store. For example, the prices of the products should be provided, and interestingly, this was also rated as the third most important item by the respondents. Product availability should also be indicated, together with a detailed size chart, especially if the e-tailer is unknown or less known, and the product colours should be clearly presented.

Park *et al.* (2009:920) mentioned that to satisfy the online shoppers need for the sensory experience of apparel-related products on an e-store, it is important that various online visual merchandising aspects need to be present, such as detailed size indications, price indications, colour information and product stock indications. Kawaf and Tagg (2012:7) highlighted the fact that online shoppers need to see the actual product colour instead of the screen colours, which could be different, which is an important aspect to consider (Kaikkonen, 2012:15). Park *et al.* (2009:918) further mentioned that online shoppers might avoid purchasing apparel-related products online due to the inaccuracy and unreliability of garment colours, fabric and details.

Interestingly, the two lowest ranked themes were “Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation” (ranked twelfth) and the lowest ranked theme (ranked thirteenth) “Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal”. The respondents regarded



both these themes as less important when compared to the other themes. This may allude to the fact that visual appeal, such as the background and font colours used, the type of font, and availability of hyperlinks, may be a secondary considerations for consumers, especially when compared to the functionality, ease of use, security, customer service, product information and presentation when shopping online for apparel-related products. According to Katrandjiev and Velinov (2014:86), background colours and font colours are regarded as “low task relevant environment” categories, which are relatively unimportant to completing the shopping activity, which supports this research finding.

Together with the ranking in importance of each online visual merchandising theme, as discussed above, the relationships between the themes were also established through a factor correlation matrix stemming from the exploratory factor analysis, and it was evident that the themes were all interrelated. Refer to Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3 and Table 6.25.

Lastly, the impact that each of the online visual merchandising themes had on the respondents’ online purchasing behaviour was determined through a three-point Likert scale (refer to Appendix I, question 6 in the self-administered web-based questionnaire). It was evident from the data that the respondents indicated that all the provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising themes (derived from Part 1, the qualitative section) would increase their online purchasing behaviour. According to the findings discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.5, the primary themes that would increase online purchasing behaviour included the following:

- Product information (price, stock and size information),
- Security (safe transactions, protection of personal information),
- Customer service (delivery information and cost, website registration, website responsiveness),
- After-sales service (product packaging and tracking) and
- Virtual Navigation (menu options, website quality, user-friendliness).

All of the 13 online visual merchandising themes were correlated with each other, as shown in Table 6.25 in Chapter 6 and in Table 7.5. The framework is presented in a simplistic way, for the purpose of interpretation, without any lines indicating the

correlations between the themes, as it is not clearly readable when all the lines and values are added. For example, the correlation between theme (factor) one (1) and theme (factor) three (3) is .293 which is significant, as the p-value is smaller than 0.1 ( $p < 0.1$ ).

Table 7.5 is placed below for the convenience of the reader to see the correlations between the themes.

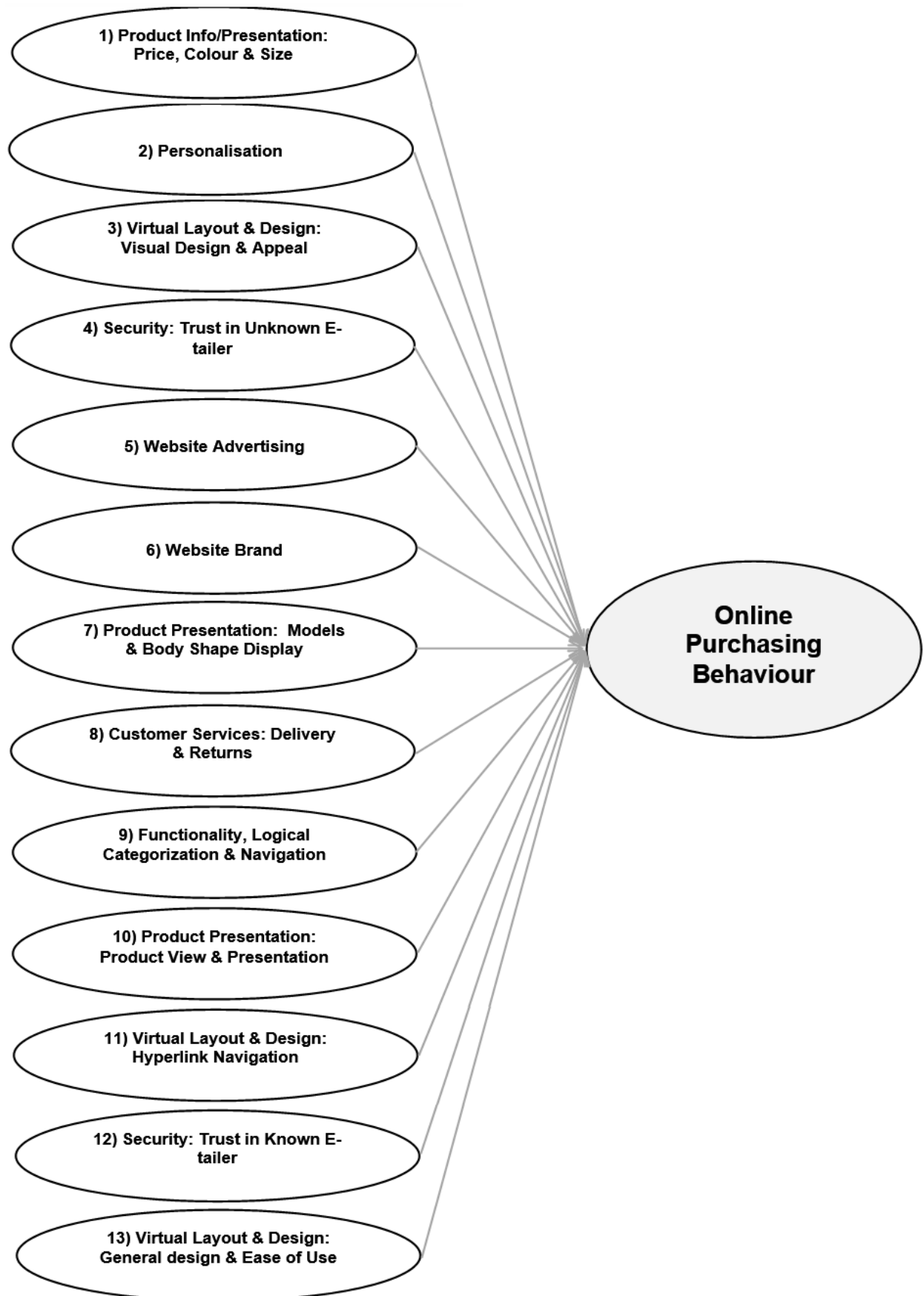
The visual presentation of the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework is illustrated in Figure 7.3 below the table.

**Table 7.5: Correlations between visual merchandising themes**

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1												
2	.361**	1											
3	.293**	.314**	1										
4	.623**	.350**	.213**	1									
5	.365**	.388**	.292**	.313**	1								
6	.406**	.530**	.303**	.274**	.342**	1							
7	.425**	.464**	.462**	.494**	.440**	.314**	1						
8	.623**	.332**	.236**	.593**	.362**	.311*	.440**	1					
9	.692**	.251**	.281**	.544**	.267**	.304**	.392**	.583**	1				
10	.612**	.423**	.351**	.460**	.395**	.495**	.426**	.496**	.572**	1			
11	.308**	.235**	.310**	.249**	.211**	.224**	.236**	.199**	.306**	.315**	1		
12	.357**	.737**	.287**	.458**	.431**	.355**	.531**	.398**	.328**	.374**	.211**	1	
13	.701**	.223**	.360**	.539**	.280**	.294**	.403**	.506**	.719**	.590**	.341**	.308**	1

\*\* Significant at the  $p < .01$  level

Source: Author's own compilation



**Figure 7.3: Proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework**

It can be concluded that secondary objective 5 has been achieved, as the relationships (propositions) among the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework constructs have been addressed and explained.

The next section discusses the primary objective and main thrust of the research study which needs to be addressed to answer the study's research question.

### **7.3.7 Primary objective**

The primary objective of the study aimed to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework that can be used by apparel e-tailers in South Africa to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. From the secondary objectives (which were all derived from the primary objective) it is evident that such a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework has been established.

The framework was originally derived from the literature, where an extensive content analysis was done to firstly, ensure that all existing online visual merchandising themes had been identified, and secondly, to ensure that all duplicate online visual merchandising themes were removed. The theoretically developed online visual merchandising list of themes was used as the basis for the qualitative section (Part 1) of the empirical study, where four focus group discussions, including a short survey questionnaire and a card sorting activity, examined and discussed the 12 online visual merchandising themes and 84 categories in the theoretically developed online visual merchandising themes list.

The findings obtained from the qualitative research conducted in Part 1 of the study resulted in a provisional conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, containing nine themes and 42 categories. This provisional conceptual framework was used as the basis for the quantitative research done in Part 2 of the empirical study. The provisional conceptual integrated framework was converted into a 95-item, five-point Likert scale that was used to quantitatively test how important each online visual merchandising theme was in influencing apparel consumers' online purchasing behaviour. The findings obtained in the quantitative section (Part 2) yielded a final proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework consisting of 13 themes and 82 items (see Appendix J).

It was evident from the findings obtained in both the qualitative and quantitative research that the final proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework did have an influence on both the participants and respondents' online purchasing behaviour, as each theme and item was measured according to the participants and respondents' online purchasing behaviour. Apparel e-tailers in South Africa could therefore consider using the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework as basis when creating an e-store, in order to create online trust, and therefore possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

The literature explained it well: online trust leads to commitment, which in turn, leads to loyalty (Chaston, 2015:193). However, this is not as easy as it sounds, because with online purchases, the physical reassurances that consumers have when purchasing from a brick-and-mortar store or talking to someone over a phone are non-existing, and the reality of fraud and security problems make it even worse (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012:89). It is therefore, critical that e-tailers need to reassure e-shoppers of the trustworthiness of their e-store, their brand and products.

According to Chaston (2015:193) and Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012:89), e-tailers could use common methods to reassure online shoppers of the trustworthiness of their e-store. These methods include, but are not limited to, the reputation of the brand, the familiarity of the brand name, the e-tailer's return policy, the country of origin of the brand, consumers' past experience with the brand, the promotional activities the e-tailer uses, and consumer recommendations. This literature confirms what the study found in both the qualitative (Chapter 5, Sections 5.4.2.1.9 to 5.4.2.12) and quantitative (Chapter 6, Tables 6.10, 6.11 and 6.18) research regarding online trust. E-tailers that manage to implement these methods in their e-stores, will increase consumers' online trust.

The proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, as illustrated in Figure 7.3 above, is therefore presented with the aim of assisting apparel e-tailers in developing an e-store that will reduce the overall risks associated with purchasing apparel-related products online, and rather add to the increase of online trust which will ultimately enable the e-tailer to create an e-store that will possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

Therefore, it is evident that the research question for this study: “Apparel retailers use visual merchandising themes for various reasons, such as to enhance the overall shopping experience and to display and promote the apparel items in a visually appealing manner to generate interest and ultimately sales; *can apparel e-tailers use the online visual merchandising themes to the same effect?*” was successfully answered by the researcher.

From the final proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, it can be hypothesised that the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising themes will influence apparel consumers’ online purchasing behaviour. However, this was not the purpose of this study, and therefore the researcher concludes the conclusions section of this thesis with the hypothesis.

The following section presents the recommendations, based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

## **7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings that were discussed in both the qualitative section (Chapter 5) and the quantitative section (Chapter 6), and the conclusions that were drawn from the findings, various recommendations can be offered to apparel e-tailers. The recommendations are as follow:

- It was found that the participants prefer an e-store that is uncluttered, simple, organised and which has a standardised layout, with the inclusion of key navigation features such as a search function, product categories and logical menu options. It is therefore recommended to apparel e-tailers that their e-stores should be free from clutter, vibrant colour images, and fonts that will negatively impact the uncluttered and simple layout. The layout of the e-store should therefore be easy to read, use, understand and allow the online shoppers to find what they are looking for on the e-store. For example, when the shopper enters the e-store they should be able to see all the categories of items offered by the e-store, such as male, female, kids, and then under each main category, should follow the sub-categories, such as shoes, dresses, shirts shorts and so forth., as well as the services provided by the e-store, the e-store information, delivery information, the search function tool, login or register and the checkout cart. It is important that the

colours, fonts and images used on the e-store should fit with the overall image of the e-tailer, and that a neutral background colour is used as opposed to very bright and dark colours.

- The findings obtained from both parts of the empirical study (qualitative and quantitative), highlighted the importance of trust in the e-store/website/brand, as well as the incorporation of safety features, which would, if absent, deter online shoppers from purchasing from a specific e-store or brand, especially if the e-tailer is not a well-known, or familiar e-tailer to the shopper. The respondents indicated that if the e-tailer is unknown or not very familiar to them, then it is critical for them to be assured of a secured shopping experience, and specifically, that their personal information is secured. It is therefore recommended to apparel e-tailers, especially smaller e-tailers that are not very known among the apparel online consumers, to ensure that their e-store is equipped with all the necessary security measures to ensure and guarantee a safe shopping experience. Such e-tailers should also ensure that detailed information about the e-tailer is provided on the e-store, as well as policies, contact information and reviews to put the online shopper that is not familiar with the e-tailer at ease. Apparel e-tailers should ensure that the security features, such as a login and password, the option of storing personal details or not, different payment methods such as EFT and PayPal, a secure e-store (website) html, e-tailer contact information and general information, are complete and up to date on the e-store. Well-known e-tailers are advised to ensure that their details on the e-store are regularly updated, and that all security features are incorporated to ensure that trust is, in fact, created at all times among the online shoppers. It is critical that unknown or less familiar e-tailers should pay extra attention to the security features on their e-store, as this was regarded as the most important online visual merchandising theme among respondents.
- Both parts of the study (focus groups and self-administered web-based questionnaire) found that the importance of having basic information such as, detailed and accurate size indications, price information, colour information and stock availability on the e-store, is critical, to enable consumers to be able to make an informed decision on whether to purchase or not to purchase. For example, e-tailers should ensure that the size description per item is clear and correct. This



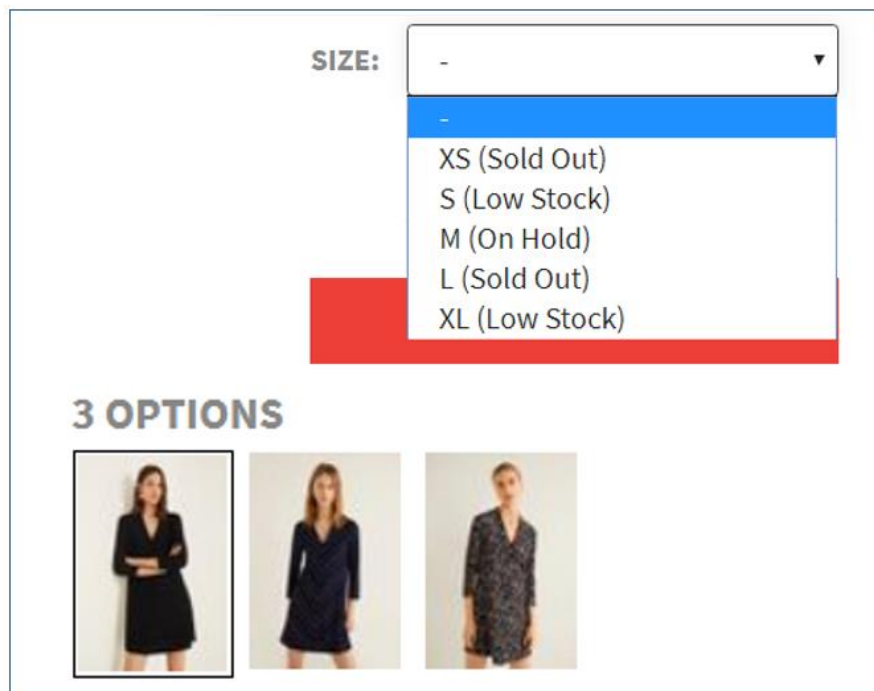
can be done by having a detailed size chart showing the available size, as indicated in Table 7.6 below.

**Table 7.6: Size chart indication**

	US	UK	SA	BUST (CM)	WAIST (CM)	HIPS (CM)
<b>SMALL</b>	4	8	32	76.2	63.5	88.9
<b>MEDIUM</b>	6	10	34	88.9	76.2	101.6

Source: Adapted from: Luminance (not dated).

It is recommended that both well-known and less known e-tailers ensure that they do have a detailed size chart indication, as this is not always the case. According to a study done by Solutions Aveo (2017), 80 to 90 % of returned fashion products are due to fit or style. As mentioned, it is also important to show the correct price per item, this was also regarded as one of the most important items among the respondents, together with the availability of stock. The participants in the focus group mentioned that the stock availability per size should be present while searching, as some e-stores only indicate that there is no stock after it has been selected for checkout. For example, the online shopper should be able to see the availability of sizes as the items are being viewed, see Figure 7.4 below.



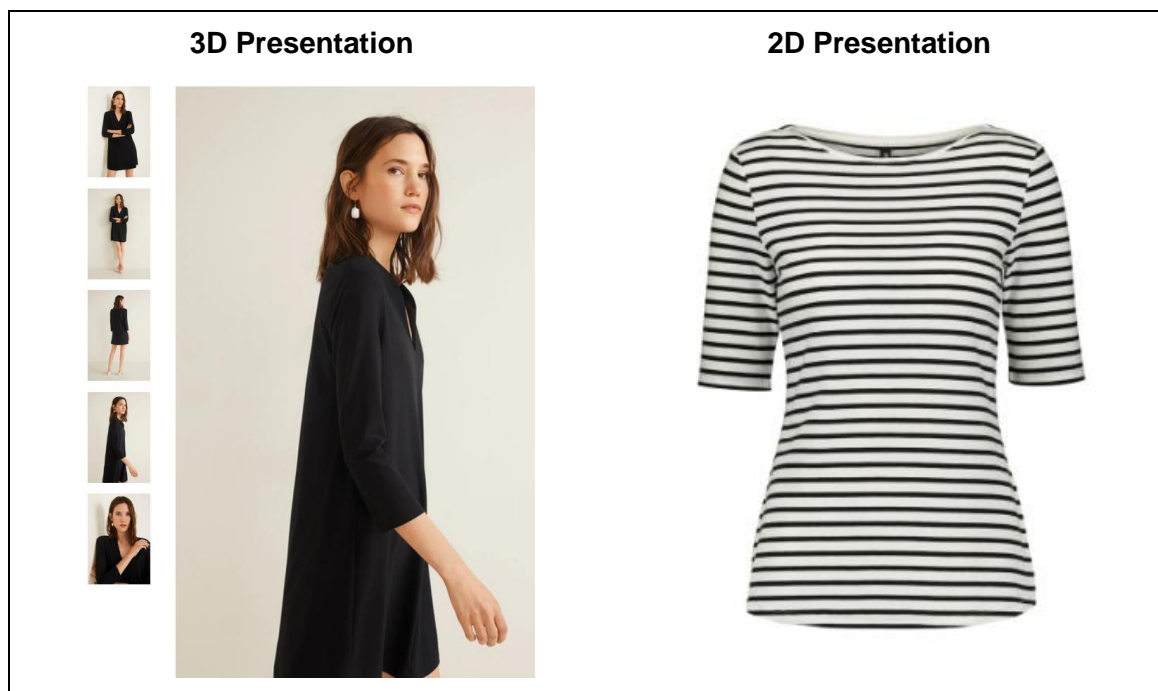
**Figure 7.4: Availability of stock**

Source: Adapted from: Superbalist.com (Not dated).

Therefore, it is recommended that e-tailers, in general, should ensure that the way in which stock availability is indicated is clear from the start, and not only when the item has already been selected for payment.

- Furthermore, the importance of basic product views, the use of a 3D method of product presentation and the critical importance of the zoom function were also highlighted among both the participants and respondents. Ha *et al.* (2007:480) said that close-up views (ability to zoom) increase purchase intent, and it reduces the risk of online purchasing, as it enables online shoppers to see the type of textile, threads and seams. Additionally, 3D views can also enhance the online presentation of products and reduce the risk associated with online purchasing (Ha *et al.*, 2007:480).

It is therefore recommended to both well-known and less known e-tailers that they should ensure that their e-stores display products in such a way that the shopper will be able to view the clothing from all possible angles, as opposed to only having a 2D presentation. Refer to Figure 7.5 below that shows the difference between a 3D and a 2D presentation.

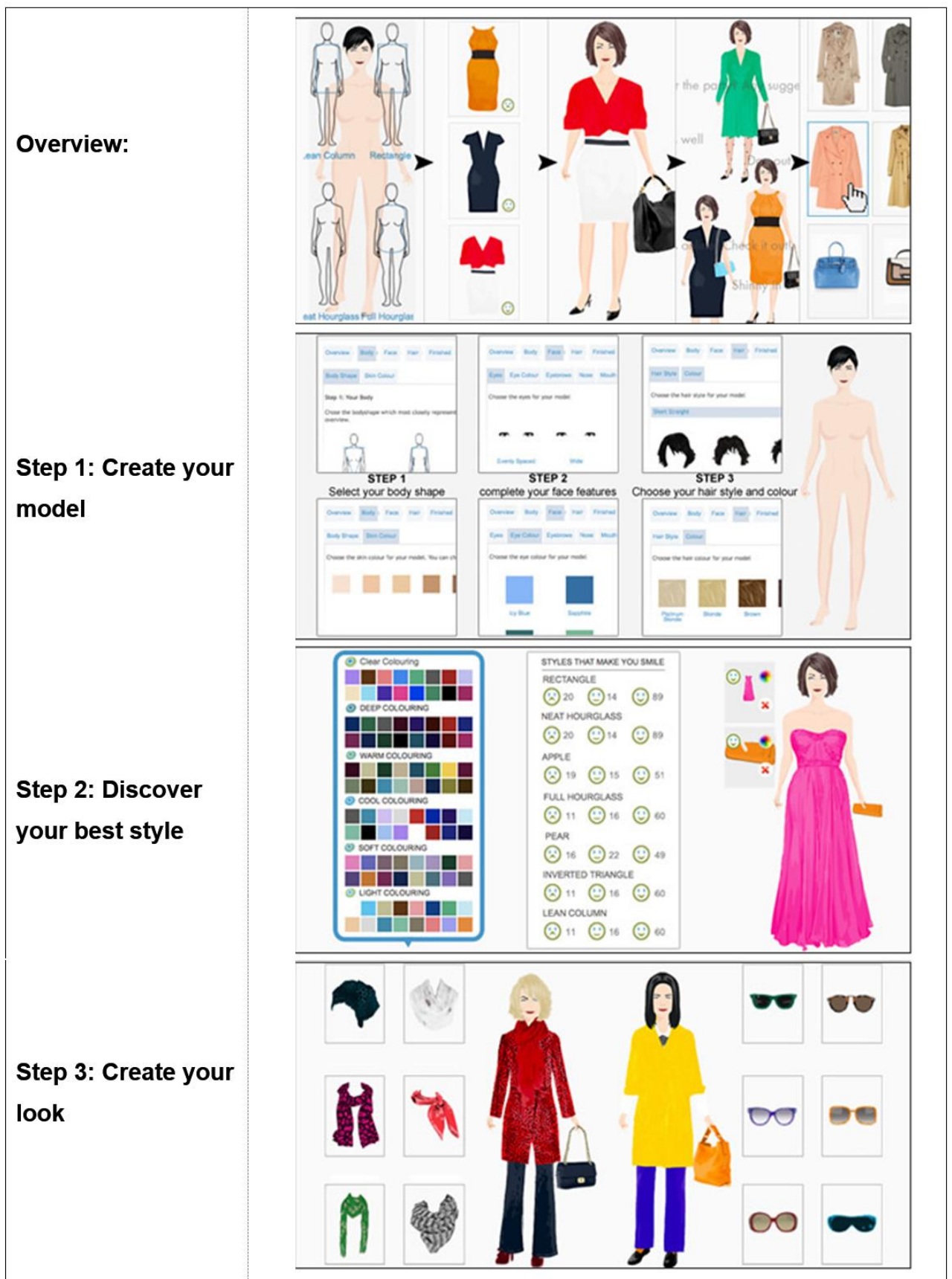


**Figure 7.5: Product presentation techniques**

Source: Adapted from: Superbalist.com (Not dated); Woolworths (2018)

- It was also evident from the findings obtained in both parts (qualitative and quantitative) of the study that there is a need among online shoppers to be able to select their own type of body shape, such as a pear-shape, an apple shape or a rectangular shape, to virtually see how the specific apparel item will fit on their body shape. Figure 7.6 below provides an example of selecting your own body shape and then styling it with the specific apparel items that the e-store offers.

It is recommended to all apparel e-tailers (well-known and less known) that they should consider the use of “creating your own virtual model” by selecting the specific body shape, providing the measurements (optional for the shopper), and then enabling the shopper to mix-and-match apparel items as they would have done in a brick-and-mortar apparel store on their e-store. This could possibly reduce the risk and ‘fear’ of not being able to fit the item, as the consumer will be able to visually see how the style will appear on their body type and know what size to take.



**Figure 7.6: Creating your own virtual model**

Source: Adapted from Joy of Clothes (2019)

- Other important items that arose from both parts of the study, referred to the e-tailer's ability to be able to help and respond to queries in a timely manner. It is therefore recommended to apparel e-tailers to incorporate a 'live-chat' option on the e-store where shoppers can ask questions in real-time from the e-tailer. Keeping in mind that online shoppers can partake in shopping activities 24/7, e-stores could inform shoppers on the 'live-chat' that their queries will only be addressed in business hours (08:00 to 17:00), and that all queries submitted after 17:00 on the 'live-chat' will be addressed first thing in the morning. All apparel e-tailers (well-known and less known) should ensure that all the information on the e-store regarding the delivery and return policy is clearly stated and up to date.
- It was also evident that having clear and detailed information on the e-store about the delivery and return policy, including the cost of delivery and returns, the delivery times and the ability to track and trace orders were important aspects for the participants and the respondents. Participants expressed the sentiment that a long delivery period or high delivery costs negate the benefits and convenience associated with online shopping, and that they will refrain from purchasing from that e-tailer.

With regards to the returning of products, it is recommended that apparel e-tailers ensure that the methods of returning unwanted products should be as convenient as possible for the online shopper. The findings of this study, as well a study by Kawaf and Tagg (2012:3) showed that as soon as consumers regard the returning of merchandise as cumbersome, then they are less inclined to purchase from that e-tailer. Poloian (2013:194) and Dent (2014:244) similarly mentioned that inconvenient return policies are regarded as being an obstacle for online shoppers. Therefore, apparel e-tailers can investigate a few options related to returning products, or ensuring that they do offer online shoppers a few options to choose from. Possible returning options could be:

- Courier company collecting the unwanted product from the shopper's house or workplace
- The online shopper can drop off the product at a brick-and-mortar store, if the e-tailer has a physical store as well.

- The online shopper can drop off the parcel at specific drop-off points closely and conveniently located for the shopper, such as particular petrol stations, or brick-and-mortar stores that have co-aligned with the e-tailer.

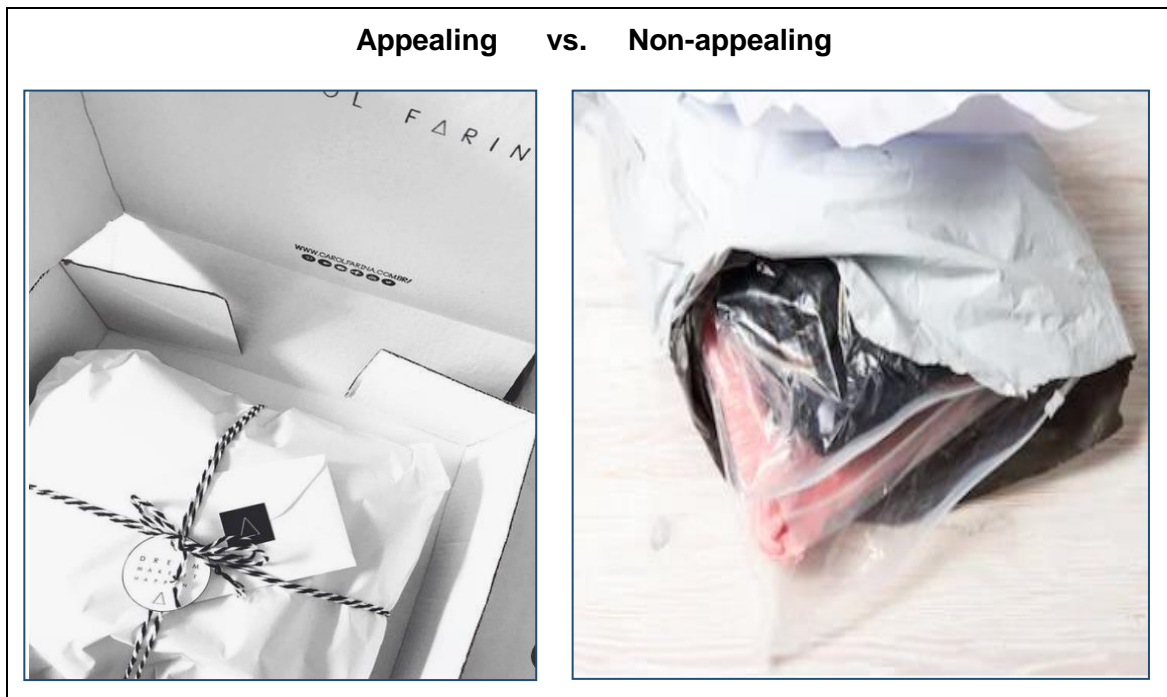
It is also advisable for e-tailers to provide a free return service to online shoppers, as a study conducted in 2017 by Solutions Alveo (2017) indicated that about 80% of online shoppers expect free returns. However, only 25% of e-tailers do offer free returns. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important for e-tailers to equip themselves with the tools and best practices that meet their consumers' expectations, otherwise the consumers will find another e-tailer that does meet their expectations.

With regards to the cost associated with delivery, it is recommended to apparel e-tailers to either provide free delivery, or to provide a threshold amount to qualify for free delivery, or to ask a very low fee, such as R50 for delivery. It was clear from the findings obtained in both the qualitative and quantitative sections of the empirical study that consumers refrain from shopping on an e-store if the delivery fee is too high (above R50). It was also evident that shoppers will shop more to qualify for free delivery, for example, "spend R450 and receive free delivery". Alternatively, it is recommended that e-tailers might add a small reasonable fee to the actual product price which the online shoppers are unaware of that could make up for the loss of providing free delivery.

- From the focus group discussion in the qualitative section of the empirical study, an additional online visual merchandising theme emerged. The participants highlighted the importance of packaging, and mentioned that the packaging of the product that they receive, contributes greatly to the perception that they have of the brand or the e-tailer. If the packaging of the product does not meet the expected quality or depicts a low level of care on the part of the e-tailer, this will negatively affect the brand image as well as the likelihood of the participants purchasing from that specific e-store or e-tailer in the future.

It is therefore recommended to apparel e-tailers to give as much attention to the packaging of the product as they do to making the sale. The apparel e-tailer should ensure that the type of packaging they use is in line with their e-tailer image, quality and price range. For example, the outer part of the packaging should be strong,

durable and be able to protect the product on the inside. Many times the packages arrive damaged on the outside, which immediately creates a negative and disappointed feeling towards the e-tailer. Colourful tissue paper that represents the colours and image of the e-tailer can be used to wrap the product, ribbons, stickers and personally addressed cards can be included in the parcel to add to the overall personal touch and experience. Refer to Figure 7.7 below for an example of an appealing packaging option versus a non-appealing packaging option.



**Figure 7.7: Packaging options**

Source: Adapted from: Pinterest (Not dated); Shutterstock (2019)

Therefore, both well-known and less known e-tailers should ensure that the type of packaging they are using is, in fact, in line with their image, price and quality, as it is a direct representation of themselves.

- From the focus groups, the participants expressed the desire to have a function called a “virtual image consultant/model” where the e-store provides assistance in terms of suggesting, matching and compiling outfits for consumers. It is recommended to apparel e-tailers to consider implementing a virtual image consultant/model as an additional function that can provide online shoppers with ‘real-time’ guidance, support and advice on the merchandise options available. For example, e-stores could have pre-planned apparel style options available that could provide online shoppers with ideas of how the items can be worn together



(mix-and-match). The assistance of a 'real-time' image consultant can also be provided by the e-store during working hours where shoppers can ask for advice, if they want to.

This function of having a virtual image consultant/model also ties-in with the 'virtual body shape' as discussed above, where online shoppers can create a 'split image' of themselves and then add items that they like to the body shape to determine the size, style and fit. Figure 7.8 provides an illustration of pre-planned apparel styles using the apparel-related products that the e-store offers.



**Figure 7.8: Pre-planned apparel styles**

Source: Adapted from: Birdsnest (2019)

- The study only yielded a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, as this was the purpose of the study. It is recommended to both well-known and less known e-tailers to compare their current e-store with this newly proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework to determine if their e-stores are in line with this framework, and to determine if their e-stores successfully address all the important aspects derived from this study, such as security measures, detailed price and delivery information and an effective search function. E-tailers that are planning on developing a new e-store can also use this conceptual integrated framework as a guideline to ensure that all the various aspects have been considered, as this framework was developed from the online consumers' perspective and has taken online purchasing into consideration.



It is important that apparel e-tailers should realise the value of having an effective e-store that is tailored in such a way that it could possibly reduce most of the risks and frustrations associated with online purchasing.

The recommendations made above are based on the findings of this research study, which was based on the South African consumers' perspective and therefore, it is recommended that apparel e-tailers carefully consider the recommendations and ensure that their e-store is error-free, user-friendly, informative and secure. It is further recommended that apparel e-tailers implement and/or use the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework as a guideline in creating and updating a new or existing e-store to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

The following section provides the limitations of the study.

## **7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following limitations are associated with this research study:

- Part 1 (the qualitative section) of the study incorporated an exploratory design, which was qualitative in nature. A non-probability judgement sampling method was implemented which can be regarded as a limitation, as the findings cannot be generalised with the greater population. It would therefore be advisable for future researchers to select a more representative sample.
- Further, based on the above point, the sample for the qualitative research was drawn from consumers living in the Gauteng province and that met the inclusion criteria, and it was therefore not geographically representative of all nine provinces of South Africa. However, due to the qualitative nature of this study, the main aim was not to be representative, but rather to be able to use the research findings for the quantitative research.
- Part 2 (the quantitative section) of the study centred on the non-probability, judgement sampling technique which was used in the study and may limit the generalisability of the results. Whilst the sample may be representative in terms of the demographics of the population of online shoppers, the majority of the respondents emanated from the Gauteng area, and may thus not be representative of the broader South African population.

- Furthermore, the sampling technique may have contributed to smaller sample sizes for the various groups within the sample which made statistical comparison between all the groups included within the sample untenable. In addition to this, the online sampling method (refer to the self-administered web-based questionnaire) that was used led to a high number of missing data within the sample, which may have an impact on the results of the statistical analyses.
- All persons who indicated that they cannot read, speak or write English were excluded from both the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study, as this was a requirement based on the inclusion criteria, as stipulated in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2.
- Any male and female consumers who had not purchased apparel-related products online from an e-store in the past were also excluded from the study, as this was a requirement based on the inclusion criteria, as stipulated in Sections 4.4.5.1 and 4.4.5.2.

The following section presents recommendations for future research.

## **7.6 FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and the conclusions discussed above, there are a few suggestions for future research. These are as follows:

- Both the qualitative and quantitative sections of the empirical study centred on the non-probability, judgement sampling technique which was used in the study and may have limited the generalisability of the results. Although the sample of the quantitative section may have been representative in terms of the demographics of the population of online shoppers, the majority of the respondents stemmed from the Gauteng area, and may thus not be representative of the broader South African population. Therefore, a recommendation will be for future research to make use of a probability sampling method that will ensure generalisability of the results, and to further ensure that the entire population of South Africa is in fact represented in the sample.
- The purpose of the study was to develop a conceptual integrated framework. It is suggested for future research to test the conceptual integrated framework on a new sample based on a specific apparel e-tailer in order to determine if the

proposed conceptual integrated framework is operational, in other words, to investigate if the conceptual integrated framework will ultimately influence consumer purchasing behaviour, and if it can be developed into a model. It is further suggested that confirmatory factor analysis needs to be done, together with a structural equation modelling technique to see whether each online visual merchandising theme does influence consumer purchasing behaviour, which will address the hypothesis that was stated in Section 7.3.7. The structure equation model therefore needs to test the online sales of a specific apparel e-tailer against each online visual merchandising theme.

- The quantitative section of the empirical study implemented a self-administered web-based questionnaire which led to a high number of missing data within the sample, which may have had an impact on the results of the statistical analyses. It is therefore recommended that a different instrument be used to collect the data that might result in less missing data.
- Although the differences between male and female shoppers with regards to the importance of the items and themes of the various online visual merchandising themes were determined, the sample of males and females was not equal, as there were twice as many females as males in the sample. It will be interesting to see if the differences are still the same if there are an equal number of males and females in the sample.
- A possible future study may refine the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework into a WebQual framework/model that will work on the same principle as the SERVQUAL model. This WebQual framework/model will then enable e-tailers in various industries, such as the safari and outdoor industry, the hardware industry, the health and beauty industry, the baby and toddler industry, the electronics and furniture industry, and so forth, to also use the framework as guideline when developing or improving their e-stores. It will be interesting to see what the current online sales per industry are, and whether this proposed WebQual framework/model could improve the online risks that are associated per industry and lead to an increase of online trust, and ultimately, influence consumer purchasing behaviour.
- Another future study could be to compare the conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework with the brick-and-mortar visual merchandising

framework to determine the similarities and to determine whether both frameworks do lead to an increased shopping experience, and ultimately, result in increased sales.

- It is recommended that the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework be tested in other countries, to determine if consumers' perspectives around the globe are in fact similar, and whether the same reasons exist for consumers purchasing or not purchasing apparel-related products online.
- An area that could add value to the current study will be to determine from the apparel e-tailers' perspective which online visual merchandising themes would influence consumer purchasing behaviour. It will be interesting to compare the two frameworks (the current one from the consumers' perspectives, with the new one from the e-tailers' perspectives) and to modify the proposed conceptual integrated framework and then to test it again among online apparel consumers.

The following section emphasises the contribution that this study has made to the body of knowledge.

## **7.7 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

As previously indicated in Chapter 1, Section 1.4, the purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework containing online visual merchandising themes that apparel e-tailers could use when developing an effective apparel e-store with the main aim of possibly influencing consumer purchasing behaviour. The reason for the development of this conceptual integrated framework for apparel e-tailers was due to the low online growth rate in South Africa. The low growth in online sales is mostly caused by South African consumers not trusting the online payment system, as well as due to a lack of not being able to see, touch, feel and try the merchandise before making a purchasing decision (Holmes, 2014:3).

According to Levy *et al.* (2012:489), visual merchandising, in general, plays an integral role in the retail industry, as visual displays have the ability to influence consumer purchasing intentions (Khakimdjanova & Park, 2005:308). However, the detailed literature study conducted in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 showed that various studies on online visual merchandising have been conducted in different parts of the world, specifically

in the US, China, Korea, and South Korea. However, none of these studies were conducted in South Africa, and also none of the studies focused on developing an integrated online visual merchandising framework containing all the important online visual merchandising themes based on the consumers' perspective that could possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Appendix B contains a detailed summary on the past studies conducted on the topic of online visual merchandising. A gap in the literature was therefore identified, and the opportunity was taken to develop a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers in South Africa, based on the consumers' perspective, to possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

This study implemented a mixed-method approach to ensure that the South African consumers' perspectives regarding the online visual merchandising themes that might have an influence on their online purchasing behaviour have been examined in detail to provide as much insight as possible.

The final proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework, derived from the quantitative research, consisted of 13 themes and 82 items and was developed in such a way that it could possibly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Apparel e-tailers, as well as apparel brick-and-mortar retailers that want to develop an online e-store, can use this conceptual integrated framework as a guideline to make their online offering as attractive as possible, while involving the least possible online risks to ensure that online trust is created, and to ensure that ultimately, consumer purchasing behaviour has been influenced.

Therefore, the proposed conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework does contribute to knowledge in such a way that more consumers will not only search for products online, but that they could possibly feel more at ease to make a purchase online, which could possibly lead to an overall increase in online sales in South Africa.

The remaining section provides an autoethnography reflection on the researcher's PhD journey, after which, the study will conclude with a final summary.

## **7.8 AUTOETHNOGRAPHY REFLECTION**

Looking back at this very challenging PhD journey, I write this last section on my experiences with mixed feelings. Feelings of relief, happiness, pride, sadness, and

even being a bit scared, to only name a few. This journey was tough, however, exciting with a lot of challenges. I have learnt the following:

- You never stop working or thinking about your PhD until it is completed;
- planning is one thing, sticking to the plan is another;
- involve your statistician from the start;
- your supervisors are your friends, not your enemy, so embrace the feedback they give you and implement the feedback immediately;
- work every day on your PhD, never stop working, thinking or reading, as to start again is hard;
- it hardly ever works out as you plan, embrace it, and carry on from there;
- time is not always your friend;
- set due dates for yourself and stick to it;
- it is your journey, therefore it is your responsibility, not your supervisor's;
- have a plan B and C, as the empirical part of the study will throw you lemons at times;
- patience becomes your new best friend;
- put your whole being in the PhD - do it and complete it; and
- lastly, do enjoy it, because when it is done, the journey is over.

What an incredible journey. I have learnt so much through this entire process, of myself, the topic, research in general, and how consumers think, behave and do.

The study concludes with the summary below.

## **7.9 SUMMARY**

This last and final chapter of this research study presented the conclusions based on the research objectives and findings. Various recommendations were made for South African apparel e-tailers, together with various future research suggestions and opportunities. The limitations experienced during the study were re-examined and the contribution to knowledge made by this research study was explained. Lastly, the chapter concluded with the researchers' autoethnography reflection on the PhD journey.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



### UNISA DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date 9 March 2018

Dear Mrs Elsa Corinne Wessels

**Decision: Ethics Approval from  
2018 - 2021**

NHREC Registration # : (if  
applicable)

ERC Reference # :  
2018\_MRM\_002

Name : Mrs Elsa Corinne  
Wessels

Student #: 49128663

Staff #: N/A

**Researcher(s):** Mrs EC Wessels, 0124292819, nellec@unisa.ac.za

**Supervisor (s):** Prof MC Cant, 0824425703, cantmc@unisa.ac.za  
Prof JA Wiid, 0124292381, jwiid@unisa.ac.za

#### **Working title of research:**

Developing an integrated visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers: A South African consumer perspective.

**Qualification:** Postgraduate degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa Department of Marketing and Retail Management Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for 3 years.

*The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the Department of Marketing and Retail Management Ethics Review Committee on 8 March 2018 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:



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1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Department of Marketing and Retail Management Research Ethics Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. Minor changes suggested by the committee be amended on the Form 1.

*Note:*

*The reference number **2018\_MRM\_002** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

*R. Machado*

Signature  
Acting Chair of Department of  
Marketing and Retail Management ERC  
E-mail: machar@unisa.ac.za  
Tel: (012) 429-4020

*[Signature]*

Signature  
Executive Dean: College of Economic and  
Management Sciences  
E-mail: mogalmt@unisa.ac.za  
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URERC 25.04.17 - Decision template (V2) - Approve

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## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF PAST STUDIES CONDUCTED

Topic	Authors	Year	Country	Methodology
Online Shopping Environments in Fashion Shopping: An S-O-R based review	Kawaf, F. Tagg, S.	2012	Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content analysis of 25 articles</li> </ul>
E-atmosphere, emotional cognitive, and behavioral responses	Kim, H. Lennon, S.J.	2009	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experimental design</li> <li>230 female students</li> </ul>
The role of online store atmospherics in consumer behaviour	Kaikkonen, T.	2012	Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not indicate</li> </ul>
Online apparel retailing: roles of e-shopping quality and experiential e-shopping motives	Ha, S. Stoel, L.	2011	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-administered online survey</li> <li>Sample 298 college students</li> </ul>
The impact of online store environment cues on purchase intention	Chang, H.H. Chen, S.W.	2008	Taiwan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web-based survey questionnaire</li> <li>Sample 672 (628 was useable)</li> </ul>
A Study of Comparison Analysis on Online Visual Merchandising Practices between Korea and China	Park, H.H. Li, Q. Jeon, J.O.	2009	Korea China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Descriptive research</li> <li>Content analysis</li> <li>200 stores were analysed</li> </ul>
Online Visual Merchandising (VMD) of apparel web sites	Ha, Y. Kwon, W. Lennon, S.J.	2007	USA Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content analysis</li> <li>50 USA and 50 Korean websites were compared</li> </ul>
Online Visual Merchandising of Apparel E-retailers	Ji, X. Pang, C.	2006	USA China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploratory approach</li> <li>Content analysis</li> <li>6 apparel retailers</li> </ul>
Online visual merchandising practice of apparel e-merchants	Khakimdjanova, L. Park, J.	2005	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploratory approach</li> <li>Content analysis</li> <li>32 apparel e-tailers</li> </ul>

Investigation of Online Visual Merchandising (OVM) Elements of Apparel Web Stores	Katrandjiev, H. Velinov, I.	2014	USA Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Content analysis of 200 apparel stores</li> </ul>
Critical Atmospheric Cues in Designing Online Stores: The Case of Amazon.com	Koo, W. Park, H.	2017	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-administered questionnaire</li> <li>▪ Sample 1374</li> </ul>
Website Atmosphere: Towards Revisited Taxonomy of Website Elements	Gatautis, R. Vaiciukynaite, E.	2013	Lithuania, Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Theoretical article</li> </ul>
Consumer Response to Online Visual Merchandising Cues: A Case Study of Forever 21	Jiajing Wu	2014	University of Minnesota (USA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quantitative case study</li> <li>▪ Online questionnaire</li> <li>▪ Convenience sample</li> <li>▪ Sample 165</li> </ul>
Translating the Need for Touch to Online Fashion Shopping via Digital Technology	Perry, P. Blazquez, M. Padilla, S.	2013	United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lab-based experimental design</li> </ul>
Atmospheric Qualities of Online Retailing: A Conceptual Model and Implications	Eroglu, S.A. Machleit, K.A. Davis, L.M.	2001	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conceptual model</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

### Consent Form

#### Developing an online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers: A South African consumer perspective

Mrs Corinne Wessels  
Marketing and Retail Department  
University of South Africa

Dear Participant,

I am a Phd student in the department of Marketing and Retail Management at the University of South Africa. As part of my thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Professor Michael Cant and Professor Jan Wiid. This study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by offering a comprehensive online visual merchandising framework that can be used as a strategic tool to guide e-store (website) design and planning for South African apparel e-tailers. The online visual merchandising framework will incorporate the online visual merchandising themes, based on existing literature and South African consumers' perspective, which is needed to develop an effective e-store that will stimulate online sales in South Africa.

South African apparel e-tailers can therefore apply the findings of this research study to their e-stores depending on the outcome.

This focus group session could last up to two hours. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this session at any time without penalty. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential. The focus group, short survey questionnaire and card sorting activity will be anonymous. All identifying information will be removed from the collected materials, and all materials will be stored securely in the research department at Unisa.

With regards to being quoted, please **initial** next to any of the below statements that you agree with:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published (I remain anonymous) or if a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree to the recording of the focus group session.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

**Participant's signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mrs Corinne Wessels at 0833165557 or by e-mail at [nellec@unisa.ac.za](mailto:nellec@unisa.ac.za). You can also contact my supervisors Professor Mike Cant by e-mail at [cantm@unisa.ac.za](mailto:cantm@unisa.ac.za) or Professor Jan Wiid by e-mail at [jwiid@unisa.ac.za](mailto:jwiid@unisa.ac.za). This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Mr. Andries Masenge from the Bureau for Market research at Unisa at 0124293058 or by e-mail at [masena@unisa.ac.za](mailto:masena@unisa.ac.za). Thank you for participating in this study.

## **APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the factors that **increase** your likelihood of purchasing apparel items online? In other words what motivates you to purchase apparel items online?
  
2. What are the factors that **decrease** your likelihood of purchasing apparel items online? In other words what prevents/demotivates you from purchasing apparel items online?
  
3. We are now going to have a look at the list of elements provided. What is your opinion about each of the following elements in terms of importance, and will it increase or decrease your intention to purchase?

**APPENDIX E:**

**THEORETICALLY DERIVED ONLINE VISUAL MERCHANDISING  
THEMES USED AS BASIS IN THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

<b>1. Virtual layout and design</b>	
1.	Website structure/layout (the way in which all information on the website is placed and the structure, for example, a picture with the category name, or a side bar containing names, or everything scattered)
2.	Navigation design (May contain bars, hyperlinks, image maps, drop-down menus, collapsible menus and search options)
3.	Web design (overall attractiveness- layout is attractive and design is pleasing)
4.	Website's visual appeal (good layout that is organised)
5.	Web functionality (layout enables search for products)
6.	Website geometry (the orientation/position of major buttons on the main (first) page)
<b>2. Website content</b>	
7.	Information provided (site provides enough information)
8.	Content quality- information provided and completeness thereof
9.	Time (quick and easy to work)
10.	Specific content quality- ability to find specific details and appearance
11.	Information content (availability of info on website)
<b>3. Website navigation</b>	
12.	Search engine, tool or function (within the website)
13.	Categorisation of items (e.g. women-clothing-dresses or women-shoes-boots)
14.	Availability of related website link and category link
15.	Sitemap is given
16.	Logical menu options

17.	Website quality i.e. Technical adequacy- appropriate technologies (ease of navigation, downloading speed & links) are used on the website
<b>4. Virtual atmospherics (sight &amp; sound)</b>	
18.	Music (background music)
19.	Videos
20.	Pictures/photos/graphics used to display items
21.	Colour - background colours, colours surrounding the products, percentage of white space (open spaces between design elements/objects)
22.	Fonts used (text)
23.	Fonts (text) colour used
<b>5. Product presentation / Presentation technique</b>	
24.	Types of product view (front view, back views, side view)
25.	Presentation methods/format (2D & 3D)
26.	Detailed views/ Image focus views by zooming in on products (image enlargement)
27.	Colour and fabric swatch (thumbnail images that shows the type of fabric and colour of the product)
28.	Colour presentation (various colour options are given under the picture)
29.	Mix-and-match/garment coordination (presenting a product together with other products, select a top and bottom for a mannequin)
30.	Human model are used to display clothing
31.	Mannequins are used to display clothing
32.	Flat surfaces are used to display clothing
33.	Hangers are used to display clothing
34.	Videos are used to display clothing
35.	Whole view of human model or mannequin available
36.	Availability of various body shapes (enable the shopper to choose body shapes)

37.	Location of an image (top left, centre, right)
38.	The number of pictorial images (how many per item)
39.	Product density (density of pictures and text- “crowdedness” compactness and how space is arranged),
40.	Image quality and size (larger picture draws more attention)
<b>6. Product information</b>	
41.	Detailed size indication/measurement explanation (giving a detailed size chart comparing cm with size)
42.	Textiles/material image (fabric swatch)
43.	Fibre content composition indication
44.	Sewing quality indication
45.	Price indication
46.	Colour information offer (colour chip, colour image and written indication,)
47.	Product stock indication (available or out of stock)
48.	Garment coordination (mix-and-match options)
49.	Manufacture place indication (indicating where the garment was manufactured, for example, China, SA)
50.	Product comparison information (ability to compare products with each other)
51.	Garment details (A written or image description about the garment, e.g. trimmings, shoulder or sleeve treatment, shape)
<b>7. Virtual theatrics</b>	
52.	Animation techniques (use of cartoons)
53.	Fun (fun to shop at this website)
54.	Inviting (website is inviting)
55.	Excitement (website is exciting to buy from)
56.	Vividness (media richness)



<b>8. Virtual social presence</b>	
57.	Communities (active online community that enables consumers to interact with each other)
58.	Communication (communication between visitors or visitors-retailers)
59.	Recommendations (recommendations made by web-based systems or visitors of the site towards shoppers that are not sure what they are looking for)
60.	Avatars (use of avatars “images, icons” are regarded as a sources of virtual social presence )
61.	Real-time interaction forums (live chatting with sales people)
62.	Blogs (Customer product reviews)
63.	Social media (enable consumers to share products)
64.	Crowding (traffic to the website)
65.	Interaction tool (email)
<b>9. Customer service</b>	
66.	Responsiveness (ready and willing to respond to customers)
67.	Shipping costs and information (reasonable and visible)
68.	Willingness to help (support staff willing and competent to assist)
69.	Timely responses (feedback is provided)
70.	Problem solving (enough information is provided to answer questions- FAQ)
71.	Delivery terms indication
72.	Return policy indication
73.	Selling agency/organisation/e-tailer information (clear and sufficient information on the e-tailer is provided)
74.	Custom-made service (if the e-tailer provides custom-made products, enough information should be provided)
75.	Registration requirements (need to register or not)
76.	E-store events (information should be provided when special events occur)

<b>10. Security</b>	
77.	Privacy is protected
78.	Safe transactions
79.	Trust (ability to trust the website)
80.	Security (adequate security features is incorporated on the website)
<b>11. Web advertising</b>	
81.	Sale/promotion/advertising signage (any visual elements used to inform the shopper of sales or promotional offers, coupons, free shipping etc.)
<b>12. Website brand</b>	
82.	Image of website (good or bad)
83.	Personality refers to the mental presentation of a website
84.	The brand ensures trust and reduces perceived risk (a well-known brand is perceived to be reliable, safe and trustworthy)

## APPENDIX F: SHORT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

### Dear Participant

This questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A focuses on the most important online visual merchandising elements and Section B focuses on your demographic profile. This should not take you too long to complete. Please complete both sections.

### SECTION A

#### QUESTION 1

Based on your opinion, what are the **five (5) most important** online visual merchandising elements that will increase your likelihood of purchasing? Please provide the name of the online element and your motivation.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## QUESTION 2

Can you think of any additional online visual merchandising elements that were not discussed in the focus group session, which is in your opinion important?


## SECTION B

Please complete each question by placing a tick (X) in the most relevant block.

## QUESTION 3

Please indicate your gender.

Male	1
Female	2
Other	3

## QUESTION 4

Please indicate your aged category.

18-25	1
26-35	2
36-45	3
46-60	4
Older than 61	5

## QUESTION 5

Please indicate your employment status?

Student	1
Unemployed	2
Working for an organisation	3
Self-employed	4
Retired	5
Other	6

Other - please specify:

--

**QUESTION 6**

Please indicate your ethnicity group.

African	1
White	2
Indian	3
Coloured	4
Asian	5
Other	6

Other - please specify:

**QUESTION 7**

Please indicate your monthly income.

R0 - R5000	1
R6000 - R12 000	2
R13 000 – R20 000	3
R21000 – R30 000	4
R30 000 +	5

**QUESTION 8**

How often do you shop for apparel online?

Yearly	1
2-3 times a year	2
Once a month	3
2-3 times a month	4
More than 3 times a month	5

**QUESTION 9**

When you shop for apparel online, do you shop for either yourself or someone else?

Myself	
Someone else	

**QUESTION 10**

What type of apparel items do you purchase? For example clothes, shoes etc.


**Thank you very much for you willingness and time!**

## APPENDIX G: CARD SORTING ACTIVITY FOR THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>VIRTUAL LAYOUT AND DESIGN</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEBSITE CONTENT</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>
<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEBSITE NAVIGATION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>VIRTUAL ATMOSPHERICS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>
<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRODUCT PRESENTATION / PRESENTATION TECHNIQUE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRODUCT INFORMATION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>
<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>VIRTUAL THEATRICALS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: #0056b3;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>VIRTUAL SOCIAL PRESENCE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>CUSTOMER SERVICE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SECURITY</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEB ADVERTISING</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Focus Group no.____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEBSITE BRAND</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rating no.:_____</p>

**APPENDIX H:**  
**PROVISIONAL CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED ONLINE VISUAL**  
**MERCHANDISING FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED FROM THE DATA**  
**OBTAINED DURING THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

<b>1. Virtual Layout, Design &amp; Navigation</b>	
1.	Website structure, layout and geometric
2.	Navigation design
3.	Website design and visual appeal
4.	Pictures
5.	Background colour
6.	Text style and colour
7.	Font colour
8.	Search engine tools
9.	Categorisation of items
10.	Logical menu options
11.	Website quality/ functionality
12.	Quick and easy to work website
<b>2. Product Information &amp; Presentation</b>	
13.	Type of product views and presentation (2D/3D)
14.	Zoom function
15.	Colour presentation and information
16.	Human models
17.	Various body shapes
18.	Product density
19.	Image quality and size
20.	Detailed size indication
21.	Price indication
22.	Product stock indication



<b>3. Security</b>
23. Protection of privacy 24. Safe transactions 25. Ability to trust website 26. Incorporated security features
<b>4. Customer Service</b>
27. Responsiveness and willingness to help 28. Shipping cost and information 29. Delivery terms indication 30. Return policy indication 31. Registration requirements 32. Content quality (completeness of information)
<b>5. After-sale Service</b>
33. Product packaging 34. Product tracking
<b>6. Website Brand</b>
35. Image and personality 36. Trust in brand
<b>7. Website Advertising</b>
37. Online sale promotions/advertising 38. E-store events
<b>8. Virtual Social Presence</b>
39. Product reviews/general customer reviews 40. E-tailer contact information/interaction tool

9. Personalisation
41. Virtual image consultant
42. Virtual model

## **APPENDIX I:**

### **SELF-ADMINISTERED WEB-BASED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

Dear Respondent,

I am a PhD student in the Department of Marketing and Retail Management at the University of South Africa. As part of my thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Professor Michael Cant and Professor Jan Wiid. I am inviting you to participate in my study. This study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by offering a comprehensive online visual merchandising framework that can be used as a strategic tool to guide e-store (website) design and planning for South African apparel (clothing-related products) e-tailers (online retailers). The online visual merchandising framework will incorporate the online visual merchandising elements, based on existing literature and South African consumers' perspective, which is needed to develop an effective e-store that will stimulate online sales in South Africa.

The questions presented in the survey are regarding the online visual merchandising elements that apparel e-tailers should use on their e-store (website) that could stimulate and increase consumers' online purchases.

You are kindly required to answer the questions as honestly as possible in order to determine the online visual merchandising elements that will stimulate your online purchases. Please note the following:

- The survey should not take you longer than 15 minutes to complete.
- Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time.
- All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential.
- The questionnaire will be anonymous and all identifying information will be removed from the collected material, and all material will be stored securely and electronically.

**By clicking the “start” button you agree to the following:**

- Confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the study.
- Understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.

**START**

## SECTION A

### QUESTION 1

Indicate the percentage of where you personally shop for apparel-related products (total should add up to 100%).

*(Apparel-related products refers to any “material” that you can cover your body with, e.g. clothing, shoes, hats, scarfs etc.)*

Online	1
Physical store	2
Total	<b>100%</b>

### QUESTION 2

How often do you shop (buy) for apparel-related products online?

Never	1
Once a year	2
2-5 times a year	3
Once a month	4
2-5 times a month	5
More than 5 times a month	6

If “NEVER”, please go to question  
4

### QUESTION 3

Indicate the percentage of where you shop online for apparel-related products (total should add up to 100%).

Well-known e-tailers (e.g. Spree, Zando, Woolworths etc.)	1
Unknown e-tailers (e.g. smaller individual designers who have a website)	2
Total	<b>100%</b>

*(E-tailer is an online retailer)*

#### QUESTION 4

Please indicate all the reasons why you shop (or would like to shop) online for apparel-related items:

Convenience	1
Wider variety of apparel-related products	2
Wider availability of apparel-related products	3
Personal safety	4
Better prices of apparel-related products are available	5
Ease of comparing prices	6
Quick to browse online (saves time)	7
24/7 access to shopping	8
Other – please specify:	9

#### QUESTION 5

Please indicate on a scale of 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important), how **important the following online visual merchandising elements are in influencing your online purchasing behaviour**.

	IMPORTANCE				
	1 Unimportant	2 Less important	3 Don't know	4 Important	5 Very important
1. Website structure that has a standardised layout (Major buttons such as "search" button is positioned at the same place as all shopping websites)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Website layout that is easy to use	1	2	3	4	5
3. Easy to find what I am looking for on the website	1	2	3	4	5
4. Hyperlinks that are available	1	2	3	4	5
5. Hyperlinks that open on another webpage/window	1	2	3	4	5

	IMPORTANCE				
	1 Unimportant	2 Less important	3 Don't know	4 Important	5 Very important
6. Hyperlinks on the website take me to the right place	1	2	3	4	5
7. Website design that is basic (not cluttered)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Visual feel/appearance of the website	1	2	3	4	5
9. Website design that is well organised	1	2	3	4	5
10. Product pictures are of high quality	1	2	3	4	5
11. Pictures show various angles of the product	1	2	3	4	5
12. Pictures that represent the product accurately	1	2	3	4	5
13. Background colour that is neutral	1	2	3	4	5
14. Background colours that are bright	1	2	3	4	5
15. Background colour that complements the product	1	2	3	4	5
16. Font colour that is neutral	1	2	3	4	5
17. Font colour that complements the picture	1	2	3	4	5
18. Font colour that complements the background colour	1	2	3	4	5
19. Font style that is basic	1	2	3	4	5
20. Font style that is cursive	1	2	3	4	5
21. Font style that complements the brand image	1	2	3	4	5
22. Availability of a search function	1	2	3	4	5
23. Search function that works well	1	2	3	4	5
24. Product categorisation that is logical	1	2	3	4	5
25. Product categorisation that is specific	1	2	3	4	5
26. Menu options that are logical (e.g. women –shoes – sneakers)	1	2	3	4	5

	IMPORTANCE				
	1 Unimportant	2 Less important	3 Don't know	4 Important	5 Very important
27. Menu option names are relevant (e.g. women wear, men's wear)	1	2	3	4	5
28. Download speed of pictures	1	2	3	4	5
29. Download speed of information	1	2	3	4	5
30. Three product views (front, back and side) are available per product	1	2	3	4	5
31. Large product views	1	2	3	4	5
32. Products are presented in 3D format	1	2	3	4	5
33. Products are presented in 2D format	1	2	3	4	5
34. Product views can turn 360 degrees	1	2	3	4	5
35. Availability of a zoom function	1	2	3	4	5
36. Zoom function that shows the type of material of the garment	1	2	3	4	5
37. Availability of product colour options	1	2	3	4	5
38. Product colour options that are available are shown on the garment	1	2	3	4	5
39. Product colour is presented accurately	1	2	3	4	5
40. Product colour description is detailed	1	2	3	4	5
41. Human models are used	1	2	3	4	5
42. Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)	1	2	3	4	5
43. Availability of various body shapes	1	2	3	4	5
44. Products are presented on each type of body shape	1	2	3	4	5
45. Ability to select your size on the body shape	1	2	3	4	5
46. Ability to select your height on the body shape	1	2	3	4	5

	IMPORTANCE				
	1 Unimportant	2 Less important	3 Don't know	4 Important	5 Very important
47. Product layout is simple	1	2	3	4	5
48. Product pictures are clear	1	2	3	4	5
49. Product pictures that enlarge if I move the mouse over the image	1	2	3	4	5
50. Detailed size chart that is available	1	2	3	4	5
51. Size chart that is available in all conversions (e.g. UK, US, SA, USA)	1	2	3	4	5
52. Size chart that is provided when the brand/e-tailer is unknown	1	2	3	4	5
53. Prices of products are provided	1	2	3	4	5
54. All pricing options are provided per garment size	1	2	3	4	5
55. Product availability is indicated	1	2	3	4	5
56. Secured shopping experience	1	2	3	4	5
57. Personal information is secured	1	2	3	4	5
58. Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer	1	2	3	4	5
59. Login with details (username and password) are required	1	2	3	4	5
60. Saving of credit card details is optional	1	2	3	4	5
61. Various payment options are available (EFT, PayPal, cash on delivery, credit card etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
62. Detailed information, such as copyright and date of registration of the website	1	2	3	4	5
63. A secured website html (https)	1	2	3	4	5
64. E-tailer that responds to queries quickly/promptly	1	2	3	4	5
65. Delivery information that is complete	1	2	3	4	5
66. Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price	1	2	3	4	5



	IMPORTANCE				
	1 Unimportant	2 Less important	3 Don't know	4 Important	5 Very important
67. Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)	1	2	3	4	5
68. Free delivery on purchases over a certain amount	1	2	3	4	5
69. Delivery time frames are provided	1	2	3	4	5
70. Complete return policy that is available	1	2	3	4	5
71. Product returns that are easy	1	2	3	4	5
72. Product returns that are free	1	2	3	4	5
73. Registration process is lengthy (require detailed information)	1	2	3	4	5
74. Guest registration is available	1	2	3	4	5
75. Quick checkout is available	1	2	3	4	5
76. Detailed information about the e-tailer is provided, if the e-tailer is unknown	1	2	3	4	5
77. E-tailer contact information is available	1	2	3	4	5
78. Product packaging in general represents the e-tailer	1	2	3	4	5
79. Quality of product packaging	1	2	3	4	5
80. Order tracking that is available	1	2	3	4	5
81. E-tailer's brand image is good	1	2	3	4	5
82. E-tailer/website brand image is well-designed	1	2	3	4	5
83. Personality of the website brand is inviting (nice to browse)	1	2	3	4	5
84. E-tailer's brand is well-known	1	2	3	4	5
85. Online promotion events (specials) that are available	1	2	3	4	5
86. To be notified about an online sale	1	2	3	4	5
87. To be notified about an online sale via email	1	2	3	4	5

	IMPORTANCE				
	1 Unimportant	2 Less important	3 Don't know	4 Important	5 Very important
88. To be notified about an online sale via SMS	1	2	3	4	5
89. General reviews of the e-tailer's website	1	2	3	4	5
90. Customer reviews of the products	1	2	3	4	5
91. Customer reviews of the e-tailer/brand should be on a different website (e.g. hellopeter)	1	2	3	4	5
92. Assistance/advice given by the e-tailer on the website about product colours, styles etc.	1	2	3	4	5
93. Ability to communicate with an online image consultant	1	2	3	4	5
94. Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website	1	2	3	4	5
95. Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape	1	2	3	4	5

## QUESTION 6

Please indicate on a scale of 1 (decrease online purchasing), 2 (no effect on online purchasing) or 3 (increase online purchasing), if the following **online visual merchandising elements** will **increase or decrease your online purchasing behaviour**.

	EFFECT		
	1 Decrease online purchasing	2 No effect on online purchasing	3 Increase online purchasing
1. Virtual Layout (e.g. website structure, search tools)	1	2	3
2. Virtual Design (e.g. visual appeal, pictures, colours, font styles)	1	2	3
3. Virtual Navigation (e.g. menu options, website quality, user-friendliness)	1	2	3
4. Product information (e.g. price, stock and size information)	1	2	3
5. Product presentation (e.g. 2D/3D views of pictures, zoom function, body shapes)	1	2	3
6. Security (e.g. safe transactions, protection of personal information)	1	2	3
7. Customer service (e.g. delivery information and cost, website registration, website responsiveness)	1	2	3
8. After-sales service (e.g. product packaging and tracking)	1	2	3
9. Website brand (e.g. image, personality and trust of brand)	1	2	3
10. Website advertising (e.g. online sales promotions)	1	2	3
11. Virtual social presence (e.g. product and customer reviews)	1	2	3
12. Personalisation (e.g. virtual image consultant and virtual model)	1	2	3

## SECTION B – DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

### QUESTION 7

What is your gender?

Male	1
Female	2
Other	3

### QUESTION 8

What is your age category?

18-29	1
30-39	2
40-49	3
50-59	4
60-65	5

### QUESTION 9

What is your employment status?

Student	1
Unemployed	2
Employed	3
Self-employed	4
Retired	5
Other – please specify:	6

### QUESTION 10

Where in South Africa do you reside?

Gauteng	1
North-West	2
Limpopo	3
Western Cape	4
Eastern Cape	5
Northern Cape	6
Free State	7

Mpumalanga	8
KwaZulu-Natal	9

### QUESTION 11

What category best describes your gross monthly income?

Less or equal than R10 000	1
R10 001 – R30 000	2
R30 001 – R60 000	3
More or equal than R60 001	4

### QUESTION 12

What percentage category describes your gross income that you spend on buying apparel-related products online, the best?

0%	1
Less than 10%	2
11-20%	3
21-40%	4
41-50%	5
More than 50%	6

**-THANK YOU-**

**APPENDIX J:**  
**PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED ONLINE VISUAL**  
**MERCHANDISING FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED FROM THE DATA**  
**OBTAINED DURING THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

MAIN ONLINE VISUAL MERCHANDISING THEMES	ITEMS
<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Unknown</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secured shopping experience</li> <li>• Personal information is secured</li> <li>• A secured website html (https)</li> <li>• E-tailer that responds to queries quickly/promptly</li> <li>• Detailed information about the e-tailer is provided, if the e-tailer is unknown</li> <li>• E-tailer contact information is available</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: General Design, Structure and Ease of Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website layout that is easy to use</li> <li>• Easy to find what I am looking for on the website</li> <li>• Website design that is basic (not cluttered)</li> <li>• Visual feel/appearance of the website</li> <li>• Website design that is well organised</li> <li>• Product pictures are of high quality</li> <li>• Availability of a search function</li> <li>• Search function that works well</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Functionality, Logical Categorisation and Virtual Navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product categorisation that is logical</li> <li>• Menu options that are logical (e.g. women –shoes – sneakers)</li> <li>• Menu option names are relevant (e.g. women wear, men’s wear)</li> <li>• Download speed of pictures</li> <li>• Download speed of information</li> </ul>
<b>Customer Service: Delivery and Returns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery information that is complete</li> <li>• Free delivery on any purchase regardless of price</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery fee that is low (less than R50)</li> <li>• Free delivery on purchases over a certain amount</li> <li>• Delivery time frames are provided</li> <li>• Complete return policy that is available</li> <li>• Product returns that are easy</li> <li>• Product returns that are free</li> </ul>
<b>Product Information and Presentation: Price, Colour and Size Presentation and Info</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of product colour options</li> <li>• Product colour options that are available are shown on the garment</li> <li>• Product colour is presented accurately</li> <li>• Product colour description is detailed</li> <li>• Product pictures are clear</li> <li>• Detailed size chart that is available</li> <li>• Size chart that is available in all conversions (e.g. UK, US, SA)</li> <li>• Size chart that is provided when the brand/e-tailer is unknown</li> <li>• Prices of products are provided</li> <li>• All pricing options are provided per garment size</li> <li>• Product availability is indicated</li> </ul>
<b>Product Presentation: Product View and Presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures show various angles of the product</li> <li>• Three product views (front, back and side) are available per product</li> <li>• Large product views</li> <li>• Products are presented in 3D format</li> <li>• Product views can turn 360 degrees</li> <li>• Availability of a zoom function</li> <li>• Zoom function that shows the type of material of the garment</li> </ul>

<b>Security: Measures and Trust in the <i>Well-Known</i> E-tailer and Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website is from a credible (well-known) e-tailer</li> <li>• Login with details (username and password) are required</li> <li>• Saving of credit card details is optional</li> <li>• Detailed information, such as copyright and date of registration of the website</li> <li>• E-tailer's brand is well-known</li> </ul>
<b>Website and E-tailer Brand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product packaging in general represents the e-tailer</li> <li>• Quality of product packaging</li> <li>• E-tailer's brand image is good</li> <li>• E-tailer/website brand image is well-designed</li> <li>• Personality of the website brand is inviting (nice to browse)</li> </ul>
<b>Website Advertising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online promotion events (specials) that are available</li> <li>• To be notified about an online sale</li> <li>• To be notified about an online sale via email</li> <li>• General reviews of the e-tailer's website</li> </ul>
<b>Product Presentation: Models and Body Shape Display</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human models are used</li> <li>• Human models are relatable to normal body types (not super models)</li> <li>• Availability of various body shapes</li> <li>• Products are presented on each type of body shape</li> <li>• Ability to select your size on the body shape</li> <li>• Ability to select your height on the body shape</li> </ul>
<b>Personalisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance/advice given by the e-tailer on the website about product colours, styles etc.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to communicate with an online image consultant</li> <li>• Ability to create my figure (measurements and height) on the website</li> <li>• Ability to mix-and-match clothing options on my body shape</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Hyperlink Navigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hyperlinks that are available</li> <li>• Hyperlinks that open on another webpage/window</li> <li>• Hyperlinks on the website take me to the right place</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Layout and Design: Visual Design and Appeal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background colour that is neutral</li> <li>• Background colour that complements the product</li> <li>• Font colour that is neutral</li> <li>• Font colour that complements the picture</li> <li>• Font colour that complements the background colour</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX K: DECLARATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDIT



Dear Ms Wessels

This letter is to record that I have completed a language edit of your PhD thesis entitled "Developing a conceptual integrated online visual merchandising framework for apparel e-tailers: A South African consumers' perspective".

The edit that I carried out included the following:

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Punctuation
- Pronoun matches
- Word usage
- Sentence structure
- Correct acronyms (matching your supplied list)
- Captions and labels for figures and tables
- Spot checking of 10 references

The edit that I carried out excluded the following:

- Content
- Correctness or truth of information (unless obvious)
- Correctness/spelling of specific technical terms and words (unless obvious)
- Correctness/spelling of unfamiliar names and proper nouns (unless obvious)
- Correctness of specific formulae or symbols, or illustrations.

Yours sincerely

Retha Burger

11 November 2019